Lost Girls: SEX AND DEATH IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

Nicholas Terpstra

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Lost Girls

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Sex and Death in Renaissance Florence

NICHOLAS TERPSTRA

The Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore

This book was brought to publication with the generous assistance of the Lila Acheson Wallace–Reader's Digest Publications Subsidy at Villa I Tatti.

© 2010 The Johns Hopkins University Press
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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Johns Hopkins University Press
2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363
www.press.jhu.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Terpstra, Nicholas.
Lost girls : sex and death in Renaissance Florence / Nicholas Terpstra.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-8018-9499-2 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-8018-9499-9 (hardcover : alk. paper)
1. Orphans—Italy—Florence—Social conditions—16th century. 2. Girls—Italy—Florence—Social conditions—16th century. 3. Girls—Health and hygiene—Italy—Florence—History—16th century. 4. Girls—Italy—Florence—Sexual behavior—History—16th century. 5. Girls—Violence against—Italy—Florence—History—16th century. 6. Poor—Italy—Florence—History—16th century. 7. Casa della Pietà (Florence, Italy)—History. 8. Renaissance—Italy—Florence. 9. Power (Social sciences)—Florence—History—16th century. 10. Florence (Italy)—Social conditions—16th century. I. Title.
HV887.I82F558 2010
362.73′2—dc22 2009037375

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Special discounts are available for bulk purchases of this book. For more information, please contact Special Sales at 410-516-6936 or specialsales@press.jhu.edu.

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To four teachers

Gary Van Arragon

Richard Rempel

Richard Allen

Paul Grendler

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Acknowledgments

The seed for this book was planted many years ago, and it's grown only through the tender care of many people, institutions, and granting agencies. The thesis has matured over time, due both to ongoing research and also to the conversations, challenges, and contributions of a very large number of people. Some conversations have gone on for years and others were quite brief. Some took place by e-mail and others face to face. I am grateful for the time, interest, assistance, and support of Sergio Ballatri, Cristian Berco, Peter Blanshard, Judith C. Brown, Gian Mario Cao, Anne Dillon, Nicholas Eckstein, John Edwards, Konrad Eisenbichler, Alison Frazier, David Gentilcore, Laura Giannetti, Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato, Richard Goldthwaite, Allen Grieco, Carol Lansing, Alexa Mason, Sara Matthews-Grieco, Luca Mola, Nerida Newbigin, Lorenzo Polizzotto, John Riddle, Michael Rocke, Guido Ruggiero, Kevin Siena, Patrizia Urbani, and David Wilson. I'm particularly grateful to Natalie Zemon Davis, who helped find a better way to present the mystery and to let the girls and women of the Pietà speak. Angela, Alison, Christopher, and Nigel have again endured and allowed much, and nothing could happen without their support and care.

The work could not have moved ahead without the contribution of research assistants John Christopoulos, Sheila Das, Amanda Lepp, Sarah Melanie Loose, and Sandra Parmegiani. All became caught up in the story in different ways, and I look forward to seeing what a few of them plan to do with it. Funds to pay them and much else were generously provided by two grants from the Associated Medical Services—Hannah Foundation, a Senior Scholar's Research Grant from the Renaissance Society of America, and a Standard Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Various bits and pieces have been presented at conferences and workshops, and I am particularly grateful for the discussions that were generated at the Biennial New College

Conference at Sarasota in 2004, the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in Atlanta in 2005, and seminars at the University of Toronto, the University of Sydney, Victoria College, Warwick University, Hebrew University, and Tel Aviv University.

This volume arose as the unfinished business of an earlier project. My thanks to Henry Tom for his early support and advice, and even more for his patience when it didn't arrive on his desk quite as quickly as promised. Parts of it have appeared in print before. Readers may be struck with a vague sense of *déjà lu* and can track down some familiar passages in "Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters: Girls and Conservatory Guardianship in Late Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 17/2 (2003): 201–29, and in *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). I think I'm done now.

The research behind the volume began while I was on a fellowship at the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence in 1994–95. A few marvelous months at Villa I Tatti in 2008 allowed it all to come together in the end. I am particularly grateful to Director Joseph Connors for the Visiting Professorship that made those months so productive, and to the Fellows, staff, Visiting Professors, friends, and family who made them so marvelous.

* * *

I've aimed here to tell a story and to look at how we do history when sources are fragmentary, contradictory, or silent. Four teachers at different schools and times were particularly important models and mentors for understanding what history is and how historians ought to work. Gary Van Arragon was willing to find unconventional ways to keep a high school student from being bored in class and knew that it was equally important to challenge students to be engaged with life, faith, and the world. Richard Rempel broadened the boundaries of those primary sources through which past cultures speak and showed how curiosity, humanity, and civility help us hear, understand, and channel those voices. Richard Allen oversaw a brief detour into Canadian intellectual history, where the paleography was sometimes even harder and where public doubts about the possibility of the project and even the very field were sometimes stronger. He showed how and why it should be done and followed his convictions out of the study and into the public square. Paul Grendler showed by direction and indirection how to read, how to assess, and how to cut to the chase. His mentoring moved from the field and the project to the profession itself, and he has consistently worked to open doors in research, work, and life. All four of these history teachers matched high professional standards with great personal generosity. Reading this, they may well wonder what went wrong. I'm grateful all the same that each of them believed that I could do this kind of thing and encouraged me in very concrete ways to try.

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Note on Dates, Currency, and Measures

Florentines counted the new year from the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25), the day when bookkeepers and scribes changed the year on their entries. All dates in this book have been modernized, so that what a Florentine would write as 15 March 1566 is given as 15 March 1567.

Florentine merchants and bankers used a gold currency for international trade (based on the *florin* in the republican period and on the *scudo* from 1530), while all Florentines kept a variety of copper and silver coins in their purses for their day-to-day purchases. Accountants kept their ledgers in a separate noncirculating "money of account" dating back to Roman times and found in various forms across medieval and Renaissance Europe. It was divided into three: *lire*, *soldi*, and *denari*; 1 lire = 20 soldi = 240 denari. Amounts might be recorded with standard symbols (hence, £2.14s.9d) or simply as numerals separated by punctuation (hence, 2.14.9). This system, in the form of pounds, shillings, and pence, was widely used across Europe from medieval through early modern times and continued in England until 1971. In the 1550s, and 1560s, when the action in this book took place, a scudo was worth between 7 and 7.5 lire. An unskilled laborer might earn 100 lire annually, and a skilled laborer might earn up to 300 lire. They would have to pay 2 lire 10 soldi for a *staia* of grain (24.4 liters), 3 lire for a *barile* of wine (about 46 liters), and 16 lire for a barile of olive oil (about 32 liters).

Merchants measured out cloth by the *braccio* (plural *braccia*). The Florentine braccio was 58.36 centimeters, or roughly 2 feet long, and was normally used for measuring cut lengths of cloth. Whole lengths of cloth were measured in *cannae* (1 canna = 2.92 meters or 5 braccia).

Various Florentine industries measured goods by the pound (*libbre*). The Tuscan pound was equivalent to 0.34 kilograms and like the modern pound was divided into 12 ounces (*oncie*).

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Lost Girls

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CHAPTER ONE

Mystery and Silence

Our story begins with desperation, a mystery, and many secrets. An intense famine in Renaissance Florence sweeps food from working people's tables. Just as it begins to subside, an epidemic fever arrives to sweep many of the survivors into the grave. A group of charitable women open a home for hundreds of the teenage girls who have been orphaned or abandoned by these twin scourges. They flock in, but many dozens of them die, sometimes within weeks. The troubled home relocates after fourteen years, and once it's gone, the neighbors won't admit to it ever having existed. Hundreds of women are involved in the effort to open the shelter and keep it running, but within a decade, they fade from the scene. Almost unbelievably in a city that runs on chatter and gossip, no one says anything about it—no impassioned sermons, no lewd songs. Manuscripts called up from the shelter's archives give a perplexing picture. One seems to say a lot, others very little. The only thing that's clear is that they are telling very different stories. This deepens the mystery: what was killing the girls of the Casa della Pietà?

I stumbled across this mystery while researching the charitable shelters that Florentines built to house girls who had been orphaned or, more often, abandoned by their parents. The Casa della Pietà, or House of Compassion, was one of the earliest. Opened around Christmas 1554, dozens of girls, most of them barely teenagers, soon jammed into its beds. A worn manuscript register gave these girls names and faces and sometimes offered clues about who they were there. On 25 January 1555, nine-year-old Margherita, daughter of Mona Betta of Florence, was among the first girls registered. One month later she was dead. A few weeks after this, fourteen-year-old Maria, daughter of the soldier Neghrante, who was stationed in the Mugello Valley to the north of the city, entered the Pietà. A year later she died in a bed in Florence's main hospital, S. Maria Nuova. The hospital's nurses likely put her beside or even in the same bed as thirteen-year-old Maddalena, named after Mary Magdalen, the saint who summoned up images of prostitution, temptation, and sin for Renaissance Italians. Maddalena's father was Friar Billi, from the prominent monastery of the Certosa just outside the city walls. The mothers of Maria and Maddalena may have been prostitutes; on this, the register is silent. Regardless, the friar's daughter had shadowed the soldier's daughter. Maddalena entered the Pietà shelter four months after Maria, took the same one-way journey over to the S. Maria Nuova hospital, and died only four weeks after Maria.[1]

Eleven-year-old Bartolomea dead in sixteen months. Twelve-year-old Chaterina in twelve months. Ten-year-old Lizabetta in six months. Fourteen-year-old Agniola in two months. Twelve-year-old Lucrezia and five-year-old Brigida in one month.[2] In every orphanage, a few children died at an early age; what's puzzling in this case are the sheer numbers. Well over half of the fifty-two girls registered on the day the Pietà first opened died under its care, many of them within months or even weeks of arriving. That shouldn't have been happening to teenagers, even in an orphanage. Only abandoned babies died in these numbers. At Florence's central foundling home, the Ospedale degli Innocenti, located just a few blocks away, a death rate that high would have been considered almost normal. Most Innocenti babies were illegitimate newborns, abandoned in the dead of night to protect the identities of mothers who likely weren't much older than Maria and Maddalena. In that tightly packed and underfunded shelter, illness and malnutrition sent many babies to an early grave, and only a fraction of those who entered the Ospedale degli Innocenti survived to walk out its gate as adults. The Innocenti's overcrowding merely intensified a problem that all Renaissance parents faced at the birth of a baby: the high likelihood malnutrition, plague, or some gastrointestinal disease would claim their child before it reached age five. The chubby, angelic *putti* who pull back curtains or peek over parapets in so many Renaissance paintings look cute and sometimes a bit saccharine. Yet their images on frescoes and altarpieces were perhaps a hope and prayer for parents who had buried a baby and tried to take comfort in the thought that their child was beyond pain in paradise.

Renaissance cities were dangerous places for babies, but children who made it past infancy usually had a better chance of surviving into adulthood. There was no good reason that so many of the girls entering the Pietà should be dying. Why were they in the Pietà in the first place? The

Ospedale degli Innocenti existed to save the lives of babies whose single mothers or desperate parents might otherwise throw them in the Arno River or on the street. Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena were entering a new form of institutional shelter that the city of Florence had only begun experimenting with in the middle of the sixteenth century—homes for older girls who had been orphaned or more likely abandoned when parents like Mona Betta, soldier Neghrante, or Friar Billi could no longer keep them. Families fragmented when parents, and usually fathers, migrated for work or died on the job, in street violence, or through plague. An abandoned or widowed mother could barely support herself, let alone any children. If both parents had disappeared or died, then family members, neighbors, and guild or confraternity brothers might take in the abandoned or orphaned children. Yet the same pressures might force them to close their doors and leave those children on the streets. Girls faced the greatest danger.

In the first half of the 1550s alone, Florentines opened three homes, and they quite deliberately accepted only girls on the verge of or in the early years of adolescence. There was a calculus at work that moralists, preachers, and government officials were sure about: take one desperately needy family and add one sexually maturing daughter and the result could only be prostitution. It happened all the time. In 1565, Florentine magistrates charged Silvio Divettino of San Miniato and his wife for prostituting their two young daughters in order to earn some money. A year later they fined Caterina of Siena in Borgo Stella for inviting the young boys of the neighborhood to come around to her house and pay for a bit of sex with her daughter Betta. Around the same time, they condemned the widow Lionarda of Empoli for pimping her married daughter for a few months while her son-in-law was out of town.[3]

Homes like the Casa della Pietà aimed to rescue girls from the clutches of desperate parents, exploitative uncles, or smooth-talking strangers who saw the teenage girls' virginity as a cure for their financial troubles. However, if the home was to stave off juvenile prostitution, or at least to protect that virginity, then why were so many girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena dying? It's especially puzzling since girls at the two other shelters that Florentines founded at roughly the same time and for the same purpose managed to survive and leave by late adolescence. They either returned to families that had become more stable, found work as domestic servants, or married and started families of their own. Some Pietà girls followed this route, but most did not get the chance.

Searching for the reasons uncovers a home that was the most distinctive charitable shelter established anywhere in sixteenth-century Italy. It was far from the conventional shelter for abandoned girls that cities throughout Italy were opening in those years. Shelters for girls came later to be called *conservatories* because they were meant to conserve the honor—that is, the virginity—of adolescent girls made suddenly vulnerable when their families collapsed. Conservatory founders never intended the shelters to be permanent homes like convents. They were way stations that would protect a teenage girl from assault and prostitution until she got a husband or a job or until her family was stable enough to take her back again. Dozens of homes opened their doors from the early sixteenth century, in big cities and in small towns alike. Some sheltered a few girls, others a few dozen, and some a few hundred. Most homes succeeded in returning their wards to society after about six or seven years. These homes worked hard to save twelve-year-old girls from streetwalking but then turned around and trafficked the virginity of eighteen- or nineteen-year-olds in bizarre rituals that might have left even prostitutes shaking their heads. Bologna's conservatories took applications from prospective husbands at the door and dangled dowries in front of them to increase the lure. Florentine conservatory girls donned uniforms and marched in public processions carrying their dowries with them in bags. Roman girls could be picked directly out of similar parade lines and brought straight to the altar by a wife-hungry man. Few conservatory girls became nuns. Most cities were desperate to see their populations increase and wanted the girls to become wives and mothers as soon as possible. They saw the homes as an excellent way to keep eligible girls fed, working, healthy, and virginal until they were ready to marry and have children.[4]

On the surface, the Pietà seemed like these other conservatories. Unlike them, it even had its own manuscript history, *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* written by some of its girls and some of its chaplains and started only a few decades after the home opened.[5] In the tradition of convent chronicles, it was the work of many different authors over many generations. A chaplain, Friar Giovan Battista Bracchesi, had started *The Chronicles* in the 1580s, and a girl of the home named Caterina took it over a decade later, after she had taken vows as a tertiary nun. More girls took similar vows in the decades that followed such that the Pietà gradually metamorphosed into a convent; yet, none of these nuns picked up the pen. By 1700, another friar, Romano Felice Viccioni, was desperate that the Pietà's stories were being lost; therefore, he began rewriting and updating *The Chronicles*, complete with pocket biographies of some individual girls. No one bothered to continue it for a few more decades, in part because Friar Romano had left *The Chronicles* notebook at the San Marco convent. That was where the Pietà's abbess Maria Teresa Petrucci went to retrieve it when she decided to transcribe the whole history in a neat hand a few decades later, adding bits and details to the unfolding story as she wrote.

The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà would seem to be as close to the "inside story" as you could hope to get, and its puzzles aren't immediately apparent. Only after rooting around further in other documents does it become clear that the most notable thing about these chronicles is what they don't say. Friar Giovan Battista and Sister Catherine are silent on all of the Margheritas, Marias, and Maddalenas who were dying by the dozens, sometimes only weeks after arriving at the home. The friars in particular wrote little about life in the home and even less about the troubled early years. Like many other chronicles written in monasteries and convents, *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* is less about human activities than about God's providence. For this series of authors, God may have allowed Pietà to open its doors as a conservatory, but He had intended it from the beginning to be a convent. With this in mind, they wrote of little beyond devotions and miracles and named few individuals apart from the early friars who had started the home and the later ones who had moved it toward its destiny, often in the teeth of opposition. No sign at all of a father like soldier Neghrante, much less the erring Friar Billi or the shady women who had borne their babies. These characters only emerge in other documents, and the more we read them, the more the suspicion grows that the chronicling nuns and friars picked up their pens as much to cover up as to explain the Pietà's early years. If this was history written by the winners, then who were the losers and what had they been up to? Why was it important to write a "correct" history that said so little about the tragedies that screamed off the pages of other archival records? The more I searched for answers in other archival documents, the more the space between the lines of that handwritten chronicle widened, and the more perplexing its questions became.

During my search, a broader cast of characters emerged from other documents to fill the spaces between those lines. Dozens of women from all social backgrounds had worked tirelessly and against great odds to open the Pietà: Marietta Gondi, the society lady who went door to door raising money and kept its patrons stoked up, and Mona Alessandra, the woodworker's widow who lived in the Pietà for almost three decades as its resident warden and did the most to make it a home for the girls. Florence's Duke, Cosimo I de' Medici, descendant of the famous fifteenth-century merchant princes Cosimo and Lorenzo, who had turned Florence into a center of learning and culture, and who himself was determined to secure tighter control over the city than they ever had. The fiery preacher Savonarola, who, despite his execution by burning in 1498, continued to inspire reformers through the following century. Dominican friars such as the charismatic and ambitious Alessandro Capocchi, who sought to control that Savonarolan legacy and the nuns and widows who challenged friars like Capocchi for that control. And a crowd of prostitutes, nurses, textile workers, and merchants whose daily lives intersected with those of the Pietà girls.

Retracing the steps in this research lets us probe the Pietà's mystery and puzzle over its secrets. It also shows us more about the kind of world that teenage girls faced in Renaissance Florence and the perplexing and often contradictory ways in which people obsessed about and traded in their virginity. Some aimed to protect it, others to profit from it, and many to manipulate it in one way or another. Virginity had economic value, moral resonance, and an almost magical power to cure. The girls' virginity could, if protected until marriage, cure the shame of their abandonment. Protecting it meant isolating them in an institution that could, if properly managed, become a cure for labor problems in the local textile industry. Seizing it could, in the eyes of some desperate men, become a cure for sexually transmitted diseases.

Talisman, resource, investment, or cure, the girls' virginity was so valuable to so many players that none were willing to trust its handling to the girls themselves. We have endless sermons and advice literature about how respectable and patrician families ought to trade in their daughters' virginity as an asset to be saved until it could be properly invested in the marriage market. We know less about "ordinary" girls whose parents were laborers, soldiers, prostitutes, or dead. These were the kinds of girls who walked through the doors of the Pietà. How girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena entered and whether they ever walked out again was a question determined by the sexual politics of Renaissance Florence. Peeling back the layers to get at this question gives us many possible answers about why so many were dying. It's a test case in how to read and interpret documents, not just because it makes the pious certitudes of *The Chronicles* ever more suspect but also because it gives us no clear answer at the end.

The Chronicles give a readable history that seems whole and complete. By comparison, the other documents left behind by an institution like the Pietà are fragmentary, uneven, and a challenge to read and understand. The Pietà's first bookkeeper and scribe, Andrea Biliotti, wrote in a firm and readable hand, but he died after only two years in the job. His successor, Pier Giorgio Ughi, then began tallying up purchases, registering the girls who entered, and recording donations of food and money. Judging by his handwriting, Ughi was always in a hurry—pen flying over the paper and scrawling out records without much concern about whether anyone else would be able to read the results. The only consolation for researchers puzzling over his accounts is that he kept the books for less than a decade. Around the summer of 1565, Giovanni Bencini followed him and stayed for decades, and by contrast to Ughi, his writing is as clear as print—at least initially. As the years rolled on, neurological infirmities forced an aging Bencini to slow his pace, and he wrote with an increasingly shaky hand. For all their illegibility, Ughi kept his records efficiently in large bound volumes that could be stacked neatly on shelves. Bencini did the same initially, but as his handwriting deteriorated, so too did his ability to keep other things together. Loose papers slowly accumulated around him, and the best he could do was periodically gather them all up, regardless of subject or chronological order, shuffle them into a reasonably neat stack with pieces of cardboard on top and bottom, and then pierce a large needle and rope through the middle to hold them all together before throwing them on the shelf beside Biliotti's and Ughi's tidy volumes.

Even apart from the foibles of their bookkeepers, homes like the Pietà faced endless challenges to keeping their records. In Florence, the Arno

River would periodically rise above its banks and flood parts of the city, including, sometimes, the rooms where records were stored: the old sodden manuscripts might then be tossed out. One of the biggest of these floods came in September 1557, and we don't even know what early records it may have washed out of the storerooms of the Pietà home located only a block north of the river. Sometimes the ever-expanding records would threaten to flood these same cramped storage rooms, and an official would prune out manuscripts deemed no longer useful. When money was tight, it made more sense to take some of the massive old ledgers to a papermaker or bookbinder who would pay good money to recycle the pages into paper or use them to pad bindings. Some documents became the diet of worms, others were consumed by fire, and others were sold; it's remarkable that so many actually remain reasonably intact.

What remains? Financial and legal records above all, because these tracked the money that was the lifeblood of any charitable institution: legacies promised or received; money borrowed or lent; property bought, rented, or sold; income earned; spiritual benefits like indulgences and privileges that could generate income; and, of course, the expenses that frequently overshadowed all these sources of income. Most orphanages kept lists or registers of the children who entered them because these, too, were assets and liabilities. Files of official correspondence sometimes remain, particularly when there were pleas to be made or justifications to be offered to the duke and his bureaucrats or the archbishop and his priests. Beyond that, a home's internal rules or statutes usually remained and often in several versions. A few decades or a century after a home had opened, changing circumstances, unanticipated problems, or new ideals could cause the gap between the founding rules and daily realities to widen perilously. The sermons of a priest or the regulations of a bureaucrat might bring changes to these rules, although the most common reason for revising statutes was to close an administrative loophole through which some clever official used fraud to pull out large sums of money. New statutes multiplied oversight without necessarily adding much efficiency. Regardless, the succeeding versions of statutes would often be bundled into a box for easy consultation and comparison.

What's often *not* present is the kind of material that speaks directly to our curiosity about what life was like inside these homes: memoirs penned by children and caregivers or letters and diaries that record daily events. Traces sometimes survive, such as the portrait of an orphan boy drawn on the back of an admission application to Florence's main orphanage, the Ospedale degli Abbandonati, or a letter by the Pietà girls to the grand duke that complains about their working conditions and threatens a strike. Yet most often, piecing together the story involves painstaking work in manuscripts that may not seem promising at first. We may not have menus, but tracking the purchases of vegetables and fruits in the financial registers gives us some idea of what the children ate from one season to the next and shows, that even in the Renaissance, large quantities of zucchini were unavoidable by the end of the summer. Cloth purchases can give a picture of what children wore but have to be tracked carefully because bolts of cloth often enter and exit the records of income and expense when they are being worked on by the children in order to earn some money for the orphanage. Some children walked in the door without even a decent pair of shoes. This was often the first item they were given—with the cost carefully recorded. Salary or piece work payments give us the names of the doctors and surgeons on retainer, the *fornaio* who baked the dough prepared by the girls, the carpenter who built shelves, or the handyman who repaired doors or secured bars in the windows. Gradually, piece by piece, we can assemble a picture of the daily workings of a home like the Casa della Pietà.

Yet even ledgers that seem at first to be straightforward, reliable, and objective can end up with gaps between the lines and silences on the page, just like *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*. Manuscripts contain information but also have many stories of their own that only come out slowly. Only a small fraction of people could write, so everyone who picked up a quill pen dipped it into the inkpot with different jobs and pressures on their minds. Sometimes they wrote for others and sometimes for themselves. Some manuscripts were open to the public, but others were places to keep secrets. Some had one writer and others many. With pages of handmade paper and covers fashioned out of smoothly finished calves' hide, even a small ledger could cost more to buy than a laborer earned in a few days or even weeks. Kept or lost, passed around or preserved, stolen or recycled, manuscripts convey as much by their stained covers and battered bindings as by the words and numbers on their pages.

As we piece together the stories of the records that tell the stories, we catch sight of a whole other level of questions. Reading one manuscript in relation to another, and using one to fill the gaps in another, we gradually create a picture that we hope makes sense of all of them. Details, hunches, and hypotheses lead us down one track of inquiry, but sometimes a single new discovery found in a random manuscript can derail the investigation. A single detail can shift the look and place of every other piece of information as quickly as the turn of a kaleidoscope. Things that once seemed clear are suddenly rendered puzzling, and the new discovery or idea may throw a radically new light on earlier explanations. A whole new level of questions and possibilities are generated. At that point, you need to shift direction and pursue the new lead. Sudden shifts like this occurred numerous times in my search to understand the Pietà's mystery, and the chapters that follow will aim to show them.

Faced with gaps and silences like these, the most responsible approach is a conservative one that does not speculate too much. Yet part of the challenge and excitement in historical research lies in pushing the boundaries. This inquiry will follow some of the hunches, false leads, tangents, and suggestions that I tested and sometimes dropped or set aside. Where possible, I've tried to convey some of the surprises and frustrations too. In the process, we explore interpretations that are at the outer bounds of probability and that may even seem to move beyond the limits of possibility. We move to those limits on the strength of evidence that is sometimes tangential or contextual. This can lead us toward interpretations that may disturb our image of what happened in the Renaissance. They may seem too faddish, anachronistic, and even teasing; less like a responsible historical investigation and more like historical novels whose empowered and sexually aggressive heroines are busy breaking barriers and bedding painters and popes. Yet these are the best ways to read into the silences that cloak this story.

Pushing the limits of interpretation reveals a society that moves far beyond our expectations. Sometimes this involves reading between the lines, and sometimes it involves reading into the silences. We encounter these all the time, and each time we ask why something is not stated directly. Is it commonly assumed? Deliberately concealed? Or did it simply never happen? Moral codes are particularly hard to deal with because sometimes the silence is overwhelmed by the voices of those who loudly promote a more restrictive code of behavior from pulpits and pamphlets. Do we shape our assumptions around a preacher's prescriptions or around other realities? Renaissance Italians had a tight moral code, and at least some people abhorred promiscuity. Yet they also assumed that sexual lust could be so strong that it would make adolescent girls sick and would consume adolescent boys. Many seem to have taken for granted that female servants were the sexual property of their masters; that "boys being boys" could extend to rape, sometimes even gang rape; and that the answer to handling their drives problem was not chastity pledges but using public money to build civic brothels where teenage boys could enjoy anonymous sex for a modest price. A restrictive sexual morality paradoxically coexisted with a sometimes offhand approach to the sex act. If we want to see the horizons of sexual experience and expectation in the Renaissance, we need to remember that both the prim madonnas of older books and the oversexed viragos of modern historical novels have more to do with our preoccupations than with theirs.[6]

Projecting bourgeois morality on the Renaissance is no less anachronistic than projecting modern promiscuity. We commonly aim to reconstruct an entire moral code from a few prescriptions, and we implicitly use our own assumptions to fill in the gaps. But this may lead us to overlook the fact that people of the time could combine what might seem to us as radically diverging elements in a single moral framework. Entertaining with an open mind what at first may be unlikely possibilities may actually help us make more sense of a very puzzling situation, but only if we are willing to push the boundaries of interpretation.

This mystery of the Pietà unfolds in the movement from one manuscript to another, one question to another, one hypothesis to another. Some questions can be resolved and others are left hanging. The deeper we go into these and other records, the more we encounter even more puzzling—and disturbing—new silences and questions than *The Chronicles*' pious cover-up. Were society lady Marietta Gondi and widow Mona Alessandra involved in a cover-up of their own? Were these two cover-ups connected in any way? And what was killing the girls of the Pietà?

CHAPTER TWO

The Setting

Sex and the City

The First Whore
I'm #19 and I was a whore
much honoured in the flower of my youth.
Till thirty-eight years I kept my health
then like an old plucked magpie lost my hair.
To keep myself, I turned to being a pimp
for this young girl I wetnursed as a child,
and lest she come to harm, I lend her around
to those who want her, and she lives with me.

Pierina
I'm Braccio's poor wee thing,
and they have made me Number Ten, and put me on the cart
for this procession. My name's Pierina,
and the triumph that awaits me is the gutter
Now Braccio's made me a collection box
I'm sent for what's on offer with the poor
I'm Number Ten, and rather would not be
with four more points, I'd get to Number Six

* * *

A raucous carnival parade featuring Florence's Top 40 whores lurches down the streets to the jeers and catcalls of apprentices and journeymen lined up deep on either side. Each whore has her own cart—or *his* own cart because, in the Renaissance as now, men in drag act the most outrageous parts at carnival. A bald middle-aged wool worker in high-heeled *chopines*, a low-cut and well-stuffed yellow dress, and lots of makeup preens for the crowd as Whore #19. The French pox has made her hair fall out and her clients desert her, so she offers up a young apprentice as the girl available for sale. A few carts farther down the line, another apprentice bends gender back and forth as a girl playing a boy—

Pierina isn't a common girl's name, and the most popular prostitutes are those who can pose as young boys. Ambitious to rise in the rankings, Pierina swivels his hips and thrusts out his rear and invites the men crowding round to come up and put it in the collection box.

Florentines couldn't get enough of sex. Different time periods have their own peculiar fixations or fascinations, and for mid-sixteenth-century Florentines, it was the relation of sex and money that obsessed them and, particularly, the appetite of sleazy adult men for young girls. They fantasized about eager teenage girls like Pierina jumping into bed with any male if given a chance. Pierina and Whore #19 appeared in an anonymous volume of carnival verses published in 1553 under the title *The Playing Cards for Forty Whores of the City of Florence* (*I germini sopra quaranta meretrice della citta di Fiorenze*). The satirical verses were like stage directions for the amateur carnival actors who played their over-the-top parts to keep spectators cheering, jeering, and rolling in the streets. In these same years, Antonfrancesco Grazzini (1503–84), pharmacist, playwright, and middle-brow intellectual, was penning bedroom farces that had all the twists and turns of Boccaccio's *Decameron*.[1] In plots more tangled than the limbs of his characters, crafty whores, frustrated nuns, and "respectable girls" meet up with hypocritical friars, lecherous old men, and eager teenage boys, often stage-managed by their conniving and completely amoral servants. In burlesque verses and plays, prostitution was a card game in which girls were the prize but adults were the players: sometimes adults were the girls' own parents, sometimes their guardians, and sometimes other sweet-talking men or women ready to put in play a girl whose parents may have died.

After the laughter died down, these wild carnivalesque verses and plays also hinted at some deep anxiety and even anger among the Florentines. La Pierina's father, Braccio, wasn't as hard up as the widows who scrabbled for a living in the city, but he was certainly willing to have his daughter turn tricks for some easy money. She has ended up hard, callous and calculating, aiming only to get ahead in her profession before the inevitable fall when her attractions and income start to fade. She might then become like the entrepreneurial and poxy Whore #19, who had wet-nursed and fostered a baby with the sole intent of turning her into a kind of old-age pension. This streetwalker turned procuress isn't far from one of Grazzini's memorable characters, the widow Mona Antonia in *La pinzochera*. Posing as a prayerful holy woman living from alms (a *pinzochera*), she spends her time busily pimping her daughter Sandra. Wet nurses and *pinzochere* were figures that Florentines wanted and needed to trust, and their laughter here would have a bitter sense of betrayal as its flip side. Who could you really trust? Was there any limit to what families or guardians might do or to what girls might become?

What was life like for young Florentine girls and for abandoned adolescents in particular? Did their lives look anything like the farces that adult men penned about them? What threats did they face? How did they survive? In the middle of the sixteenth century, as Grazzini and others were writing their comedies, other Florentines, who didn't find these situations particularly funny, started banding together to offer protection. They believed that adolescent girls were easy prey who sometimes had to be protected from others and from themselves. Police arrests of the time gave them plenty to worry about. These Florentines were particularly worried about sex in the city, and it shows in the new controls they began putting on prostitution and in the shelters they opened to help women and girls avoid the oldest profession. Florentines didn't demonize prostitutes, but they didn't romanticize them either. Their efforts to police the borders of the profession were so intense because they realized how easy a border it was to cross. In fiction, the willing girls' own lust pulled them over the boundary, but in day-to-day reality, it was poverty and a lack of options that pushed them there. Authorities aimed to bring prostitution out into the light and to throw a discrete cloak of secrecy around the protective shelters, but here, as in so much about sex in the Renaissance, there were more than a few gaps between intention and reality. As always, the more we seek answers, the more questions we uncover.

Prostitutes: Serving Boys and Saving Women

Walk down the streets of mid-sixteenth-century Florence and it seemed that all you saw were young people. About half the city's population was under age fifteen, and much of everyone's life was spent out of doors. Homes and shops were small and dark, so the work of scribes, carpenters, and tailors, and especially their younger apprentices or journeymen, spilled out onto the street where there was more light to work by. A building boom had laborers clambering over half-built houses. Market gardens, vineyards, and orchards started inside the city walls and then stretched out along the roads leading out from the city gates, and a host of young people walked out to plant, tend, and harvest these plots. Stalls lining market streets were piled with fruits and vegetables, and walking street vendors hawked everything from wine to broadsheet ballads and early newspapers. Going from one to the other were the young servants who worked in homes, ranging from the towering palaces of the Medici or Strozzi to the two-room apartments of small shopkeepers or artisans. Domestic service was to many Renaissance teenagers, and particularly to girls, what part-time jobs are to modern-day high school students—a stage that offered income, some training, and maybe even shelter but that would normally end with adolescence. Much of the work brought them out into the streets.

There was one big difference: for Renaissance teens, a low-end job was no part-time source of pocket money. It was life itself. For boys, the apprenticeship or menial job offered training that might lead to something better. For girls, working as a servant was a vital source of income that could open the door to marriage after a few years of saving for a dowry. If, for some reason, the training did not lead to a skilled trade or the service did not lead to a marriage, these boys and girls would slowly slide into the ranks of day laborers by their twenties and thirties, scrabbling for work where they could get it—digging on construction sites or shuffling goods from one house to another—and for no more than a few lire in pay. A few remained servants or went back into service when they became too old to do other physical work. So the stakes were high and the outcomes never certain. The opportunities and the uncertainty gave a sharper edge to life for young people and made adults even more concerned about shaping that life where they could.

This was particularly the case for young girls. While boys could fend for themselves if need be, girls had fewer opportunities. Cultural values, family expectations, and legal limitations all combined to raise walls around them as they moved from childhood into adolescence. Marriage was still what most girls wanted, or at least expected, and a girl who people talked about with winks and nods and shakes of their head would find it more difficult to marry. Walls of some kind had to keep out immoral influences and ambitious boys. In some cases, these walls were symbolic: rules, regulations, and customs. However, when families were richer, when girls were more valuable or vulnerable, and when parents or guardians were particularly concerned, the walls were hard as stone. Some girls were virtual prisoners in their homes, and others were lodged through their teenage years in convents, in a room-and-board arrangement known as *serbanza* that was a popular, if sometimes controversial, source of income for nuns.[2]

These walls also protected adolescent girls from themselves. According to some wags, the biggest reason girls were so easily exploited was that they didn't take much persuading. Grazzini filled his plays with eager girls like Fiametta, who during a brief vacation home from the Annalena convent where she's boarding, conspires to lose her virginity to a neighbor boy she's barely seen before. However, the playwright was just going with what neighbors and doctors took for granted. On city streets and in university lecture halls, common knowledge held that by about age twelve or thirteen both girls and boys discovered their sexual appetites and would soon be obsessed with finding ways to feed the hunger. A hungry boy could get into personal trouble, but a hungry girl put the honor of her whole family in jeopardy. Boys and girls posed different problems for those who were determined to keep them on a straight and narrow path.[3]

For boys in particular, it was more important to keep that path straight than narrow. Florence was known around Europe as a city of sodomy, a term that, at the time, covered both same-sex relations and a variety of unconventional sexual forms and positions. Hordes of young men, many of them merchants or journeymen who had traveled to Florence from over the Alps, retraced their route after a few years carrying rich Italian cloths in their bags; the newest Italian methods of shoemaking, cooking, or tailoring in their heads; exotic Italian sexual tastes in their imaginations; and Italian street talk in their mouths. These were likely the ones who turned *florencing* into the common German slang for sodomy. The reputation may have led some of these teenage journeymen from across the Alps to put Florence high on their list as a place to expand their working skills, but it wasn't just foreigners that gave Florence its reputation. Florentines themselves assumed that sodomy grew up in the workshops and streets where adolescent boys with raging hormones could find no outlet. Girlfriends were unknown. Marriage was as much as a decade away when the journeyman had completed his training and possibly established himself. That threshold, more than any age or date, would mark the end of his adolescence. Some priests and parents preached chastity for the young, while many laypeople seemed to just look the other way and assume that sodomy was the least you could expect. Boys would be boys, and when they became men, they would turn their attentions to women; no need to worry unless they carried on their adolescent taste for sodomy into adulthood.[4]

Some moralists feared that boys who developed a taste for sodomy would turn away from women altogether, at least one preacher suggested this was why Florence's birthrate was so low. The city seemed unable to recover from the collapse of its population after the Black Death over a century before. For all its noise and bustle, it still had just over half of the one hundred twenty thousand who had lived within its walls at that prosperous time. High death rates and family marital strategies that destined many women and men into celibacy as nuns and monks slowed recovery. Vivid memories and fearful attitudes prompted an immediate practical solution: brothels filled with nubile women. The problem to be avoided was not sex. The real fear was teenage boys and young men assaulting respectable Florentine girls or sodomizing one another. A publicly regulated brothel that was inexpensive and easy to find could handle both problems and more and possibly earn some money on the side. It was a win-win solution.

There is no better guide to Florence's ambivalence about sex and the city than its constantly shifting efforts to regulate prostitution. In the fifteenth century, authorities in Florence and in other European cities aimed to make it more accessible by licensing prostitutes, designating red-light districts, and opening civic brothels. By the sixteenth century, they were having second thoughts about public brothels that turned whores into civil servants. In a changed moral climate, Florentine rulers started trying to channel it more narrowly though never with the aim of banning whores altogether as the popes in Rome did from time to time, and certainly never giving up the chance to earn some public money from private lust. For every new set of rules and fees that it imposed on prostitutes through the sixteenth century onward, Florence also sold—at a higher rate—immunities and exemptions.[5]

The city's first public brothel opened for business in 1403 as the responsibility of a new magistracy called the Onestà, which roughly translates as "Decency" or "Good Reputation." This may strike modern ears as typical bureaucratic double-speak, but Florentines were serious about it: the reputation being protected was in part the young women's but also the city's. The Onestà's brothels—there were supposed to be three to make access easier, although the one in the eastern quarter of S. Croce and the one across the Arno River in S. Spirito were never built—would silence those cynics in other cities and countries who snickered that all Florentines were sodomites. Although no rule openly stated that the brothel was for adolescent boys, we don't need to read too far between the lines to determine that boys were the main targets for these new-style civic recreation centers. Married men were discouraged, and no priests or friars were allowed. Therefore, most of the adult male population was excluded. Hours of service were strictly limited, and prices were regulated. To keep adolescent boys from getting any ideas about local girls, the prostitutes serving these teenagers and young men were preferably to come from elsewhere. Dutch and German girls topped the list initially, possibly because blonde hair was popular and possibly to service the hordes of north European adolescent journeymen who'd crossed the Alps to work in Florentine workshops. By the early sixteenth century, most of the seventy or so prostitutes working the brothel were north Italian girls.[6]

The brothel occupied a set of hostels in the center of the city next to the Old Market and within sight of the towering rounded dome of the cathedral and the erect shaft of the bell tower of the Palazzo della Signoria. It was easily reached by wool workers along the Arno, cabinetmakers around S. Croce, soldiers in the pay of the duke or in the company of some visiting noble, and domestic servants from across the city—anybody with good eyes, a sense of humor, and some handle on Florentine slang could find this area where taverns had names like The Pussy, The Little Whore House, The Cunt, and The Depraved. Gambling, fighting, drinking, and fortunetelling filled the maze of narrow noisy streets. Prostitutes spilled out of the brothel to other parts of the neighborhood, and even the Medici rented rooms to them.[7] We shouldn't imagine that the regulations actually kept out married men, priests, or friars. The moralists who feared adolescent sodomy also thought that some fun with an imaginative professional woman could keep a master's fantasies from wandering to the apprentices or servants in his employ. But as we read the regulations, we need to put the deliberate exclusion of adult men alongside the city's demographics to realize for whom the brothel was intended: while never openly stated, the only group left with unrestricted access was young men in their teens and early twenties.

If it was hard to keep adult men out of the brothels, it was equally hard to keep prostitutes in them. By the early sixteenth century, the Onestà magistrates turned their attention to registering and regulating streetwalkers, and they picked up their efforts as the decades passed, pushed by the realization that many women sold sex for money outside the system. Prostitution was not just for prostitutes. One historian argues that by this time sodomy was less of a worry than the numbers of Florentine women of all backgrounds—servants, widows, and wives of poor artisans and laborers—who occasionally turned tricks to keep food on the table.[8] Some were adolescents, others much older. Judging by names like Isabella Spagnuola, Vica Pisana, Anna Fiamminga, Maria da Siena, Laura Ferrarese that come up in the Onestà records, most came from out of town to service those men who didn't want to make the trek to the brothel in the Old Market.

It was noisy work, or at least work that generated a lot of noise on the side. Wherever prostitutes gathered, parties, music, short tempers, and arguments weren't far behind. When they weren't out on the street, prostitutes were hanging out of the window calling out to men passing by or yelling at one another across the courtyard. Things switched around once night fell. Men serenaded their favorite hookers, or called up to them, or if they were angry, they would throw stones at their windows in a charivari-like caterwauling that the magistrates classified as "making a racket" (*far baccano*). If they were really angry, they lost their tempers like the spinner Marco di Andrea Finocchio, who charged into the home of Cornelia in the Borgo Ognissanti district, threw aside the baby Lisabetta that she was suckling, and proceeded to toss 80 ducats of goods—furniture, clothes, bedding, and mirrors—out the window. Few working-class Florentines had things that valuable lying around, so it was clear that Cornelia was an unregistered prostitute and likely a higher-class one. Was Marco a jealous john, a fed-up neighbor, or a threatening pimp? It hardly mattered or changed the noise level when Marco and

Cornelia were trading blows and screaming at each other, furniture was crashing down onto the street, and baby Lisabetta was wailing in the background.[9]

In 1547, the Onestà magistrates aimed to get a handle on things and contain the chaos by producing a list of the eighteen streets that prostitutes could work on. They carefully specified the stretches between a tavern here and an intersection there, and added the catch-all safeguard that prostitutes weren't to work within 100 *braccia* (or about 60 meters) of a convent or monastery. A prostitute who strayed from her street risked jail time in the city's grim Stinche prison. A man who acted up, like Marco Finocchio, could pay up to 5 gold scudi as a fine—four months' wages if he was an unskilled laborer—and spend two months in jail. If he was under eighteen, twenty-five lashes from the public executioner replaced jail time. The Onestà magistrates boosted these fines significantly when they revised their rules in 1577 and added a premium for those violators who were priests (i.e., *benefiziato*, or beneficed). Knowing that it was most often gangs of young men behind the hooting, stone throwing, and general *baccano*, and aware that a gang's solidarity and honor rested on a code of silence, the magistrates promised a quarter of the fine to any gang member who turned informer and helped prosecute an act of group violence against a prostitute. They were as serious about protecting prostitutes as they were about protecting virtue.[10]

There's a gap in the sixteenth-century prosecutions by the Onestà, but extant records paint an interesting shift. In the fifteenth century, almost twice as many women as men were charged for everything from transvestism to brawling to practicing without a license. By the later sixteenth century, equal numbers of men and women came before the Onestà tribunal, but only a fraction were prostitutes. Only a quarter of the seventy-two people charged, fined, and exiled in 1594 were prostitutes who had broken regulations. The Onestà magistrates were chasing down far more cases of assault, *baccano*, and pimping than cases in which prostitutes violated the rules of the profession.[11] Half of those charged were men.

A prostitute was supposed to pay 15 lire every three months to register with the Onestà—about the same as what a laborer would earn in a month. Her license was good only for a particular street and only in daylight hours—a night license cost an extra 2 lire and lasted only fifteen days. The street she registered for was the street she had to live on. She couldn't rent quarters in another part of town and commute to work. She couldn't even rent a corner apartment that had a window overlooking a street that wasn't on the approved list. Before going out on the street, she pulled on a yellow veil or apron, or took along a yellow handkerchief so that randy men and boys could spot her easily and honest girls and women could avoid her. When Florence first forced Jews into a barricaded ghetto in 1570, it crammed the community into the warren of streets around the old civic brothel and forced the Jews—bankers or merchants, men or women—to wear the same bright yellow signs.[12]

As the century wore on, the Onestà magistrates took aim at the higher-class prostitutes known as *cortegiani*, or courtesans: no more wearing pearls or expensive cloths worked in gold and silver; no more riding around town in coaches; no more of the lucrative sideline of telling the fortunes of women and men. The regulations and fees, the red-light streets and yellow-accented costumes all suggest that along with protecting prostitutes the Onestà was determined to put them in their place and erase the distinction between professionals and part-timers. Here too we need to look between the lines. The magistrates passed new regulations on clothing so frequently that it's clear few prostitutes were paying much attention, even though the town crier was sent through the streets to warn them of the new rules. What they were paying instead were fines: every fee had a corresponding fine, which could be stiff. Every Isabella Spagnuola or Anna Fiamminga who broke the dress code or worked the streets at night without a license could be slapped with a fine of up to 10 gold scudi. A prostitute caught living outside the street she was registered on might be fined 50 lire. This was serious money. Grazzini's *pinzochera*, Mona Antonia, gives up her fee and flees Florence with her daughter because they are unregistered and fear that the police are after them. If any of them were caught, they might end up paying one of the Onestà magistrates "under the table" at rates that beat both fees and fines. For a prostitute eking out a living as a single woman in Florence, it was all part of the cost of doing business.[13]

Soon after coming to power in 1537, Florence's Duke Cosimo I recognized how profitable that business was for Onestà magistrates, and he quickly acted to ensure that more of the money went into government coffers and possibly his own pocket. Onestà magistrates served four-month terms, and the rotating positions had become among the most popular jobs in the Florentine government—though hardly because of these magistrates' selfless desire to improve civic morals. Or to make the city streets safe from roving bands of teenage journeymen out to torment prostitutes for fun. Magistrates took a portion of the fines as their salary, and the opportunities for fleecing prostitutes and extracting other fringe benefits were enormous. The duke, himself barely twenty-five years old, launched a flurry of procedural reforms that tightened up operations. From 1544, prosecutions had to be made in public, and individual Onestà officers could not prosecute a prostitute on their own initiative or in their own office. They could not threaten a woman without just cause or clear proof, accept fines and fees directly, or determine what those fines and fees would be—all practices that magistrates had used regularly to extort under-the-table payments from prostitutes. At the same time, some loopholes remained: a prostitute like Isabella Spagnuola could avoid having to wear the yellow apron or veil by paying a higher fee. In fact, she did—along with Vica Pisana, Isabella Bolognese, and thirteen others in Borgo Ognissanti alone.[14]

Duke Cosimo I, like his ancestors Cosimo il Vecchio and Lorenzo il Magnifico a century before him, was a master at sniffing political opportunity. He shared their gift for appearing to shape his governance to reflect public concerns while maximizing his own authority and profit. His reforms tightening up both the magistracy and the profession showed that he was alert to popular anxieties about prostitution that were evident in the carnival songs presented at the beginning of this chapter. At the same time, he was determined to make sure that fees and fines did not go directly into the pockets of Onestà magistrates but possibly into his own.[15] His willingness to expand some profitable loopholes should keep us from portraying him as a puritan moralizer. Some of the Onestà regulations were little more than window dressing, like the one ordering all prostitutes to attend a special church service during Lent when a fired-up preacher would implore them to leave their lewd and immoral profession—the service was always scheduled for the week after they had registered and paid their quarterly license fee. Failing to show up for the service brought, naturally, another fine.[16] And in a process that accelerated into the seventeenth century, Onestà magistrates increased the numbers of immunities and exemptions that prostitutes could buy, allowing richer prostitutes to continue riding in carriages and living wherever they chose.

At the same time, Duke Cosimo I and his sons, Francesco I (1574–87) and Ferdinand I (1587–1609), weren't just money-grabbing hypocrites, as we can see from the effort they put into creating alternatives for women teetering on the brink of destitution. They supported different initiatives aimed at keeping some poor women from falling into prostitution, while helping others claw their way back out. The first Medici dukes were building a state, and they were looking beyond laws that affected individuals to institutional solutions. Among these were five shelters that aimed to keep orphaned and abandoned girls from selling their bodies to survive, including three that opened their doors in the 1550s and two more a few decades later. Cosimo and his sons also worked, or reworked, three institutions that aimed to throw the same protective walls around older women: an old-age home called the Orbatello; a shelter for women trapped in marriages with violent husbands (called the Casa delle Malmaritate, or House of Badly Married Women); and a halfway house for women trying to get out of the sex trade known as the Casa delle Convertite. All three shelters were ostensibly directed toward older women, but as with the brothels, we need to look a bit further to isolate the real targets. If we keep the carnival song of Whore #19 ringing in the background, we can recognize both the adult and the adolescent shelters as parts of a larger strategy meant to protect teenage girls from entering prostitution in the first place. Older women with no clear means of support were often suspected of pimping their daughters. If you want to save the daughter, shelter the mother. Unfortunately, the earliest manuscripts for the Orbatello, Convertite, and Malmaritate have almost entirely disappeared. Yet working with other sources, we can piece together a picture of what they were like and how they fit into a broader strategy of protecting adolescent girls from sexual exploitation.

Keeping Older Women off the Streets

The Orbatello was a community for women—mostly widows—whose individual apartments, subsidized rents, and encircling walls allowed them to maintain themselves honorably on the paltry income that sewing, spinning, and the interest on their dowries would generate.[17] While a few Orbatello tenants were old, others were relatively young mothers in their forties entering with their children. They tended to be from respectable working families who had not lived long enough in Florence to build up their own network of neighborhood supports. All were thought to be only a few lire a month from turning to prostitution—either walking the streets or pimping their daughters. The complex occupied a street corner a few blocks northeast of the cathedral and not far from Florence's central hospital of S. Maria Nuova. It looked like a cross between a convent and a military base, with its own church and about thirty two-room apartments in three two-story barracks. As many as 260 women and children had crammed into the shelter in the unsettled first decades of the sixteenth century, but by the 1550s, about 150 called it home. Two-thirds of these were adults, and they formed a self-governing community of matrons loosely supervised by Florence's aristocratic political association known as the Parte Guelfa. The widows freely evaded the Parte's strict regulations when it suited them, like those against admitting blacks and slaves or those ejecting drunks and troublemakers. They did it all informally without benefit of written statutes. If playing loose with the rules sometimes got them into trouble—like hiding an ineligible girl, Felicia, from Parte and priests for six years—on the whole, their age, moral authority, and defense of the community made them the de facto governors of the home.

In the Orbatello, these women could live respectably into their old age and keep their extended families together and girls safe. Aunts lived with their nieces, and some grandmothers lived with their granddaughters. Boys could stay only until age twelve, but girls could remain till marriage. The Orbatello even added 50 lire to the funds teenage girls earned themselves or received from others as they assembled the dowries that would attract husbands. This practically doubled what most girls had earned, and it allowed Orbatello girls to avoid being forced into the dangers of domestic service or the shame of the brothel.[18] Getting the girls into marriages was as important to the Orbatello as getting the widows into apartments, and it made this institution another link in Florence's chain of homes protecting teenage virginity.[19]

Of course, not all marriages turned out well. Even though they had a higher tolerance for marital violence, Florentines thought that a woman should not have to tolerate a husband who continually assaulted her or her children. Yet canon law and local custom made divorce impossible, and taking flight was almost guaranteed to drive the woman and her children into the sex trade. In 1579, a lay confraternity of men and women put its finger on the problem: "There exists in the city of Florence a great multitude of immoral women, many of whom would turn to penitence if they had a place to retire. . . . There is the Monastery for Converted Prostitutes, but it takes in women who want to be nuns, leaving many who remain in sin since they are unable to become nuns because they have husbands . . . we want the house that we will set up for them to be called the House of Badly Married Women [Casa delle Malmaritate]."[20]

The Venetian courtesan and poet Veronica Franco made the case even more directly in a petition intended for the Venetian Senate a few years later: "There are many women who, out of poverty or sensuality or for some other reason, lead a dishonourable life . . . they could easily withdraw from ill-doing if they had some reputable place to repair to, where they might maintain themselves and their children. . . . Because there is no provision for such cases, they persist in . . . this abominable crime among others: that women in need sell the virginity of their own innocent daughters."[21]

Neither Florence's confraternity nor Venice's Franco seemed to have much sympathy for these women who had been beaten out of their own households by violent husbands; they were "immoral women" leading a "dishonourable life." Franco at least understood the desperation that lay behind it. She also stated the sexual equation directly: deny these women a home, and they will sell their daughters to earn one. The Florentine confraternity acted to introduce a new factor into the equation and so change the result: their shelter for thirty women opened in 1579 in Via della Scala, which skirted just north of the Borgo Ognissanti neighborhood as it cut a path through the S. Maria Novella quarter. Women could retreat here with their children and use the shelter to rebuild their lives through honest work.

Lack of alternatives also kept registered prostitutes from leaving the trade. In the early fourteenth century, another Florentine confraternity had opened a shelter to give prostitutes and their daughters an alternative. The name they chose, the Casa delle Convertite (House of the Converted), set the problem and solution in terms of sin and repentance. They opened their shelter on via Chiara in the Oltrarno district and handed it over to the Augustinian friars within a few decades. The friars soon transformed it into a convent. Could a prostitute become a nun? Wags like Grazzini and Pietro Aretino found no end to jokes and plot twists on the idea, but the advocates of conversion homes like this, which were often dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen, weren't laughing. They countered that a convent's calm was the best setting for a prostitute to reflect on her dissolute life and then to repent. On the purely practical side, the Convertite's walls offered room and board at a cheap rate. Some women made the jump from the brothel or the streets into this quasi-convent and then stayed the rest of their lives. Others used their time in the Convertite to clear their record with the Onestà, getting their names removed from its registry of prostitutes, and exiting to make another effort to lead an honest life outside.[22]

By the 1540s and 1550s, supporters of the Convertite faced two related problems. Donations from Florentines were getting harder to find, leaving its one hundred or so nuns in such desperate straits that they couldn't buy enough food. At the same time, it was becoming easier for prostitutes to get their names removed from the Onestà registry, so they had less use for the Convertite. Florentines had long followed the old principle of using at least some of the wages of sin to fight that sin. Following this principle, the Convertite was to get about a third of the 15 lire license fee that prostitutes paid every three months. Yet it still wasn't enough. Even if the roughly 130 registered prostitutes who turned up on Florence's 1562 census paid their full fees, the Convertite's share would amount to only about 2,700 lire—a small fraction of what it cost to run the home for a year. Worse, this was a principle that even the Onestà could not enforce: in 1569, 159 prostitutes registered and paid a baffling variety of fees that were geared to income and that barely totaled 2,500 lire. Yet most of this went to cover the administrative costs of the Onestà magistrates, leaving virtually nothing for the Convertite nuns.[23]

Duke Cosimo I had brought in legislation in 1553 that turned a quarter of a prostitute's possessions over to the Convertite after she died, but Florentine prostitutes were canny enough that most could find loopholes to protect their property and direct it to the heirs of their own choosing. In desperation, the Convertite lobbied Cosimo for part of the fine that unregistered prostitutes paid when and if they were finally caught. If these prostitutes managed to keep up the ruse till death, tax officials could levy a charge on their estate, and all the proceeds would go to the Convertite. With the suspected woman in the grave and unable to work out an evasive strategy with her notary, Convertite officials could gather testimony from neighbors, have her posthumously designated a prostitute, and then fine her estate.[24]

Convertite supporters also worked to tighten up the procedures that a prostitute had to follow to get her name off the Onestà's registry. At one point, a short stay in the Convertite had been enough to earn a prostitute that release, but some enterprising whores had used this as a revolving door back into the sex trade, and others even managed to turn tricks while living at the shelter. The Convertite now kept a closer eye on its residents and aimed to make it harder for them to leave. A woman applying to have her name removed from the registry would now have to submit to an examination by officials and provide written testimony from three witnesses, including the local priest, that she had been "clean" for at least six months. A stiffening up of the law a decade later cast particular suspicion on a woman planning to leave to live on her own. Officials assumed that without a male in the house, she could really have only one source of income. Hence, a woman who had turned to prostitution after leaving her husband could not get her name off the list unless she returned to him, no matter how honorably she lived. Likewise, a woman pimped by her husband could not get off the list once he died without the testimony of neighbors and priests.[25] Both women would need to keep paying the license fee—30 lire for the half year or more that it would take to get suspicious neighbors and a skeptical priest to agree to testify that they were no longer taking in clients.

By successfully lobbying for stricter regulations, the Convertite was actually making it harder for prostitutes to leave the profession. To increase its own income, the Convertite created a situation that forced women either to continue in prostitution or to stay far longer in the Convertite. We need to go back to Whore #19, Braccio's *La pierina*, and Grazzini's entrepreneurial *pinzochera* Mona Antonia to see the thread that connects these paradoxes: the overwhelming concern that Florentines had with channeling adolescent sexuality. Apart from suppressing the worrying example provided by high-living whores, the restrictive regulations were supposed to flush out unregistered part-timers and those "reformed" prostitutes who were pimping their daughters, nieces, or servant girls. This was what Florentines assumed a poor adult woman would have to do to survive, and their social customs made it so difficult for a woman to learn the skills or earn the income necessary to support herself honestly that at a certain level they were right. Having created a dead end that forced poor women to exploit either their own bodies or those of their juvenile dependents to eat and pay the rent, Florentines then framed a solution that directed women to one of three institutional options: the institution of marriage, the institution of a charitable shelter, or the institution of regulated prostitution. A woman who refused the first two should be forced into the third (that is, forced to register and pay the license fee as a public prostitute), which should then be made so punitive that she would reconsider options one and two.

Florentines of the sixteenth century were backpedaling on their ancestors' support of prostitution as a "necessary evil" and were more determined to control the sex trade. Seeing the moral and legal shifts taking place at midcentury, it seems that they were ready to laugh at bedroom farces as long as the bedrooms weren't their own. We should not lose sight of those considerable regulations that aimed to protect registered prostitutes from exploitation and from the abuse of johns, of casually violent teenage boys, or of pointedly virulent moralizing preachers. We should remember that Florentines never lost sight that prostitutes were neighbors, acquaintances, and sometimes friends. Yet in the mid-sixteenth century, an ever-tightening moral code began to combine with heightened expectations about the obligations of government to curb disorder and about the duties of Christian citizens to help the poor and vulnerable. Florentines believed that the stick of Onestà rules and the carrot of institutional charity could work together to curb the recruitment of prostitutes, particularly juveniles who were so easily exploited by immoral adult scofflaws. Few wanted to eliminate the sex trade altogether, but many aimed to provide alternatives for those young girls in particular who were drawn or sucked into it.

Teenage Girls in Trouble

With actions like this, Florence's civil authorities were reaching in to regulate family life in ways they had never tried before. The effort to channel the sex drives of teenage boys and young men away from assault and sodomy had led the city to open a brothel at the beginning of the fifteenth century and then regulate prostitution more broadly in the middle of the sixteenth century. Renaissance Florentines saw all this as their civic responsibility. What had they done for adolescent girls?

Nothing. Through the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, girls' sexuality was a family matter. The Onestà and its brothel worked indirectly to protect those girls by diverting boys' attention away from them. Provision for boys was protection for girls—they were flip sides of the coin of adolescent sexuality. However, apart from this, civic officials did nothing directly to erect the walls that would protect girls from others or from themselves. The expanding Onestà regulations and charitable institutions of the 1540s and 1550s show us that this was beginning to change. That change marked a social revolution.

Italians had always worked on the assumption that family members were the ones best trusted to erect and defend those protective walls for teenage girls. They did it through another institution: marriage. The laws and customs of marriage sometimes made it a prison rather than a shelter.[26] High death rates twisted the dynamic and frequently caused nuclear families to fall apart. Members of the broader family became guardians over their nieces, cousins, sisters, or even sisters-in-law. When a mother died, the father might be overwhelmed with the challenge of raising the children and, if he didn't remarry, might farm them out to his relatives. The primary culprit of women's high death rates was childbirth, a dangerous event that would eventually kill one in five women either directly or indirectly. When a father died, the mother's father or brothers might pressure her to remarry, and she would be forced to leave her children behind as she walked through the doorway of a new husband's home. The usual culprit of men's high death rates was simply age: husbands frequently died before their wives because it was common for a woman to marry a man who was five, ten, or fifteen years older. Her husband was chosen by her male relatives because it seemed that his occupation, connections, or money matched their own.

CATERINA: He's worse than an old feather head. What a bad end I came to when my miserly uncles gave me to this old fool who has the nerve to fall in love with the neighbour . . . Poor man! No wonder he doesn't wake me up like he used to—almost every night—and doesn't come around with his little caresses anymore. By the Cross of Jesus they should bury us women alive as soon as we're born. Well then, shall a young woman like me remain fasting while my husband looks to eat elsewhere? That will never be the case. Since that's how things stand, from now on I want to provide for myself too.

MARGHERITA: Ah! Ah! There's my mistress. Now that you're fresh, young and beautiful act in such a way that you have nothing to grieve for later, and so that the flesh won't reproach the spirit.[27]

And so Caterina, married to the old goat Amerigo, falls into the eager arms of Friar Alberigo thanks to some skillful stage management by servant Margherita. This triangle is the comic core of Antonfranceso Grazzini's *The Friar*, and it was a theme that he and his Florentine audience found endlessly diverting. In *La pinzochera*, much of the action wheels around the unsuccessful efforts of old and gullible Gerozzo to bed the neighbor woman, leading his younger wife Mona Albiera to comment more in pity than in anger, "Poor man! You know, my brothers picked him out for me! But at least what he lacks in brains he makes up for in property!"[28]

It was a rare case when a young woman's wishes could overcome her father's, uncles', or brothers' determination to make a match that was good for the family. She had to adjust to taking as a husband a man who might be old enough to be her father and who, like her father, would almost certainly die long before she did. Emotions were beside the point. The patterns of birth and death, and a culture that saw property and procreation as the main reasons for marriage, exaggerated women's dependence on men. Women were frequently left vulnerable to male pressure at different stages of life: as an adolescent girl facing marriage, as a young woman in an older husband's house, as that man's widow, or as his orphaned daughter.

Living as the wife of an older husband was one thing, but surviving as his widow or orphaned daughter was another. She might be able to live independently, but it would almost certainly mean living in poverty because there were so few ways to earn a decent income. An artisan's widow might find shelter with her children in the Orbatello; a younger widow from a family of merchants or professionals could be forced to live with her parents, brother, or uncle, and they might decide to put her back on the marriage market to get her off their hands. She and her children were essentially property to be negotiated in a demanding and particular market whose rules were familiar to everyone. If she was in her twenties, and hence still able to bear children to a new husband, her father and brothers could make some new beneficial connections through her by arranging a new marriage. They would contact her dead husband's family and demand the return of the dowry to advance these negotiations. Her in-laws were legally obligated to restore any cash, property, and goods that might constitute that dowry but retained control over—and responsibility for—any property that had been generated in the marriage. This included the children.

Any young widow regardless of class was caught between the interests of her family and her in-laws: her own interests weren't necessarily the concern of either. Her in-laws would work hard to convince her to remain single and to help her maintain the children because the alternatives were simply more difficult for them. If she remarried, they lost the use of her dowry while gaining the burden of her children. Her new husband had no obligation to take on children who were, after all, someone else's property. That property would then be sent to the care of the dead husband's brothers, uncles, aunts, more distant relatives, or, for that matter, anyone else who could be persuaded or paid to take them. Some children ended up as servants and others as apprentices, but they were seldom welcome additions to households where resources were already stretched to the limit. This left them vulnerable and under extreme pressure because all property was expected to generate income or at the very least return a favor.

Florentines howled at the carnivalesque Whore #19 and Braccio's daughter Pierina. They made authors like Pietro Aretino and Antonfrancesco Grazzini into bestsellers and stood ready at the bookstalls to see what characters like old goat Amerigo or young and lusty Caterina would get up to next. However, behind these comic characters were legal cases that set the city buzzing and fueled the imaginations of both satirists and moralists. Midcentury Florentines heard of men like Domenico di Giovanni Scarpellino of Settignano who had raped his virgin sister-in-law Sandra and of Giusto di Giovanni di Ciullo of Battifolle who had made his sister-in-law Maria pregnant; the girls may have been sent to stay with their married sisters when their mothers died or remarried. They heard of Bartolomeo di Marco, a cloth weaver in Via Chiara, who attacked his female apprentice, Francesca di Tonio da Porciano, raping her "both from the front and from behind." Unlike many Italian apprentices, Francesca lived in Marco's house, and so was most likely an orphan entrusted to his care by relatives who were unable or unwilling to take her into their own houses. Just as those working to establish the Casa della Pietà were collecting enough sheets, beds, and lire to open their shelter, Florentines were shaking their heads over the prosecution of Piera di Santi Bicchieraio who had found clients for her daughter Maria and then hid her in the house for five months after she had become pregnant. Cases like this, together with those of parents like Lionarda of Empoli, Silvio Divettino, and Caterina of Siena, whom we found in the chapter 1, pimping their daughters, raised the uncomfortable question: can you really trust family?[29]

At times the question of whether family was to be trusted was simply beside the point because there was no family around, or at least none that the neighbors or priest could track down. At that point, the human property could simply be abandoned. A girl whose father had died, whose mother had remarried, and whose paternal family was unable or unwilling to offer a home could find herself thrown out on the streets to fend for herself. If she could find no shelter, she would have to find her own way of generating income.

It's easy to paint adolescent girls as passive rag dolls who were the playthings of scheming brothers or leering uncles. Sometimes they were active agents of their sexuality, either to feed their own hunger or to be the bait that would trap a man seeking to feed his. In Grazzini's *La pinzochera*, young and respectable Fiammetta, raised in a convent, eagerly participates in the scheme that will let her hop between the sheets with neighbor boy Federigo, who she's only seen a few times through the window, and whose father has nixed their marriage hopes. Is this just an aging lecher's fantasy, or blaming a girl for rape? We once again have to read between the lines to see when girls might have taken things into their own hands. What was Florence's criminal court, the Otto di Guardia, to make of rape accusations like the one that carpenter Cecchino di Grazia leveled against Gualtiero Fiamingo, a maker of glass windows who stole into Cecchino's house through an open attic window at night and then set to work stealing daughter Alessandra's virginity as well? Or Battista the wool beater's accusation that wool weaver Bernardino di Bilio of Cremona had come a few times for sex with his virgin sister Geva? Unlike the girls who had been assaulted by employers or pimped by family, Alessandra and Geva seem to have welcomed these men as lovers and potential husbands.[30]

A man might get into a girl's bed by promising to marry her, and if he later reneged, she could take him to court to sue him for breach of promise. Charges of rape were a way of forcing a man to either go ahead with the marriage or to come up with a dowry that would allow the woman to attract another husband. The detour into the courtroom could either represent a man's effort to seduce, a woman's to entrap, or a couple's to force the hands of parents: it could even be a bit of all of these and, at least at the level of entrapment, could hint at strategies that involved collusion by more family members.[31] Grazzini's young lovers, Fiammetta and Federgio, stage the "discovery" of their supposedly secret bedroom tryst to force Federigo's father to drop his opposition to their marriage—and all this with the willing participation of Fiammetta's parents, Mona Albiera and Gerozzo, who play the parts of the outraged parents with aplomb.[32] Mona Albiera is surprised but hardly upset by her daughter's initiative and acts so quickly and cunningly that we can understand the reservations that Federigo's father has about her.

Florentine court records have some of the same farcical potential. Did Cecchino initially look the other way when the Flemish glazier Gualtiero came to check out what was on the other side of the attic window? Was Battista the wool beater looking to hook up his family professionally with Bernardino the wool weaver, using sister Geva as the lure? What about the sorry crew of Girolamo and his unnamed sister on Via Palazzuola in the Borgo Ognissanti district? They were happy enough to arrange the sister's marriage to Iacopo Genovese even though they knew he'd abandoned a wife back in Genoa. Iacopo and the sister had sex together frequently, and the siblings only soured and spilled the beans when Iacopo went off and married another woman.[33] If the family trouped off to court claiming that the man had forcibly raped and deflowered a virgin sister or daughter, that could indeed be what had happened. Or it could mean that their strategy had backfired, the daughter's and family's public reputation was now in tatters, and the case claiming violent rape was a last-ditch strategy aimed at recovering some honor and getting some cash. Another way to recover family honor when these strategies failed to result in marriage or a dowry was to abandon the girl and turn her out of the house.

The institution of marriage had its own problems. Was it really that different from the sex trade? Grazzini's pinzochera Mona Antonia pimps her daughter more openly than Mona Albiera and Gerozzo do theirs, but both quite willingly trade on their daughters' sexuality, as do Braccio and Whore #19. Court records gave similar stories without the laughs. When Florentines turned to the Convertite, Malmaritate, and Orbatello homes, they were aiming to solve problems arising from marital breakdowns. True or not, they imagined that poor widows, abused wives, and reluctant prostitutes with mature appetites and little money had few options beyond the sex trade, and so these women and particularly their daughters were better off behind the walls and locked doors of a shelter. What about girls who lacked even this dubious maternal care? Or girls who at age ten or twelve had been orphaned or abandoned and who needed protection from others and maybe even from themselves? The same logic that opened institutions for adult women operated even more powerfully for these girls, and Florentines responded by opening three separate homes for orphaned and abandoned girls within four years in the 1550s.

They had already been moving in this direction for almost a decade. Duke Cosimo I had started working on improvements to Florence's network of charitable institutions shortly after coming to power. These might have the title *ospedale* or *casa*, and there was a dizzying number of them, some with a handful of beds, others with dozens. Some had been born from the guilty consciences or piety of individual rich men decades or even centuries before and were still maintained—or at least administered—by their descendants. Others had been opened as health co-ops by artisans' guilds or religious confraternities to care for "our own"—an artisan injured on the job or a *confratello* who was sick. Some were run by village councils and others by village churches. There were more than three hundred of them in the duke's state of Tuscany. Some were well managed while in others funds found their way into the pockets of overseers, staff, or clergy, leaving little or nothing for the poor.

Cosimo I wanted to attack fraud and see the funds available for charity used more efficiently. Following experiments and models tried elsewhere in Europe for a few decades before, in 1542, he appointed a dozen magistrates to audit the books, review the charters, and examine the activities of each charitable institution in Tuscany.[34] They had the power to seize assets and fire employees if they found fraud and could divert any excess funds in one or another ospedale's balance sheet to support a new charitable institution for orphans and beggars that the duke was planning for Florence. Cosimo's magistrates formed a new permanent government commission, and to give them added heft and money, the duke expropriated the funds and property of one of the city's oldest and richest confraternities and turned it over to their use. Appearances were important here, but they were also deceiving: the confraternity of S. Maria del Bigallo would still exist and still operate out of its prominent headquarters facing the cathedral across the square of S. Giovanni Battista, but all of its existing members and officials had been dismissed, and all of its many properties and obligations were now transferred over to the team of magistrates that Cosimo had appointed. The duke had engineered a giant bureaucratic shell game, and to complete the illusion of continuity, he made the magistracy take on the name of the Bigallo.

This particular confraternity was seized because, over the previous three hundred years, it had assembled a huge real estate portfolio that included many small hospitals that it had taken over with the help of church and state. If a small artisan's hospital or confraternal shelter had been teetering on the brink because of lack of funds or poor administration, authorities believed that it would be better to have it absorbed into the Bigallo than go under entirely. Some wealthy individuals establishing hospitals had even asked that the Bigallo take their charitable project under its administrative wing. This had left the Bigallo as a kind of charity slumlord, holding on to derelict hospitals across Tuscany, largely so that its own officials could siphon funds from legacies and rental properties into their own pockets. By expropriating the "old" Bigallo and turning it over to his group of magistrates as the "new" Bigallo, Cosimo I signaled that he meant business. He planned to root out fraud and centralize charity in a new kind of ducal welfare system with three new institutional shelters—one for abandoned boys, one for abandoned girls, and one for beggars—as the jewels in the crown. However, the ambitious young duke got cold feet or at least second thoughts. His loyal Bigallo magistrates threw themselves into their work so vigorously that they caused an uproar of protests from local hospitals, guilds, confraternities, and patrons across Tuscany at a time when his own ducal crown was too insecure to risk giving his enemies anything to organize around. Fearing that he had created a monster, Cosimo I discreetly withdrew political support from the Bigallo while still keeping it in place as a magistracy that audited hospitals and administered the only one of the trio of institutional shelters that actually opened, the Shelter for Abandoned Boys (Ospedale degli Abbandonati).

Which is not to say that the other shelters did not emerge or that Cosimo I had lost his interest in charity reform. Early on, the new Bigallo magistrates gave a few small subsidies to a private home for abandoned girls that an aristocratic Florentine widow Lionora Ginori had started in the early 1540s. When the widow died, they tried to convince Cosimo I to let them take over the home as a way to jump-start the planned Shelter for Abandoned Girls (Ospedale delle Abbandonate). Instead, he froze them out. Word had leaked back to him that many of his political enemies had been involved in Ginori's private shelter, so Cosimo I wanted it closed altogether. Yet his wealthy and much-beloved Spanish wife Eleonora, daughter of the Vice Regent of Naples, convinced him to keep it open for the sake of the girls sheltered there—entrusted not to the overenthusiastic Bigallo magistrates but to a new confraternity. This was a variation on the shell game of a decade earlier. The new confraternity would take over the home, but it would also take on a new name that underscored its emphasis on vulnerable girls alone: St. Mary of the Virgins (S. Maria delle Vergine). Eleanora's intervention moved Ginori's girls a few doors over into a small hospital located across the street from the Pitti Palace in the Oltrarno district, which the duchess had bought only two years before and which she and Cosimo were busy renovating into their official residence.[35]

S. Maria delle Vergine drew its new quarters out of the real estate holdings of the Bigallo, and it drew its girls from Florence's better-off artisanal and shopkeeping families. Yet this handled only part of a growing problem. Four years later in 1556 Duke Cosimo I again bypassed the

Bigallo magistrates and ordered the administrators of Florence's city jail, the Stinche, to do something about the problem of orphaned and abandoned girls who were being assaulted in the streets and marketplaces of Florence. These girls may have been trying to eke out an existence selling used items in the market, and this second home soon gathered dozens of girls. Like S. Maria delle Vergine, its name resonated: the early Christian bishop St. Nicholas (S. Niccolò)—celebrated in later centuries and cultures as Father Christmas—had saved three noble girls from being pimped by their penniless father when he threw a purse in through their window with enough coins in it to give each a dowry. The S. Niccolò shelter opened in the working-class Oltrarno district, and when its overstretched prison supervisors appealed to Cosimo I for help, he put it under the control of the confraternity of S. Maria delle Vergine.[36]

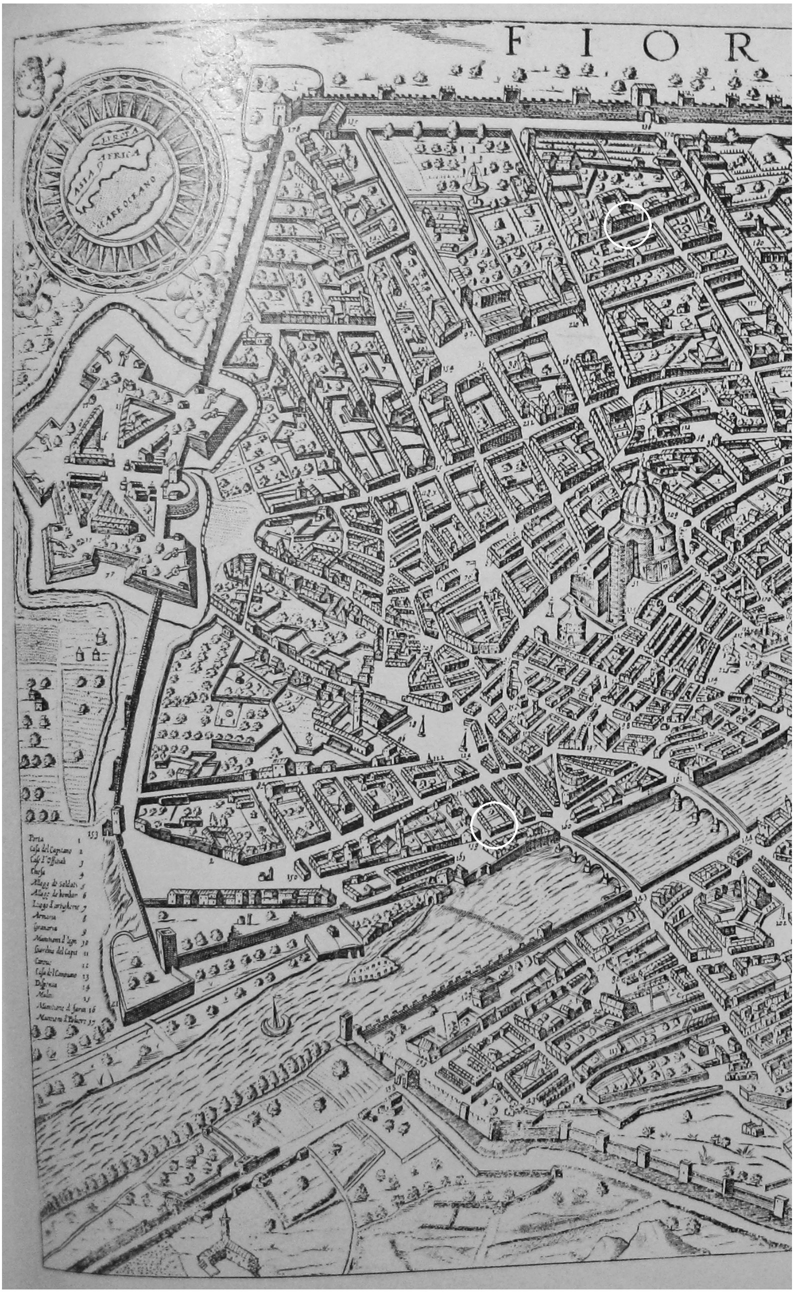
The Virgins confraternity was turning into Florence's institutional virgin cure—it helped open four more homes for abandoned girls in the decades ahead. Among these it had a hand, albeit more indirectly, in the third home that opened in the first half of the 1550s: the Casa della Pietà. The Pietà emerged in different circumstances and was less directly tied to Cosimo's grand project of organizing a statewide system of poor relief. Yet it did arise out of the same protective impulse that Florentines generally were feeling toward orphaned and abandoned young girls in those years. We can turn to *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* to pick up the story or at least one version of it. Two priests who were strangers to Florence, one from Milan and the other from Pistoia, were overwhelmed by what they encountered when they came to this famous center of culture and learning. How could a place that was so refined be so callous about leaving abandoned teenage girls to walk the streets? Locked in prayer, Don Antonio Cattani Milanese and Friar Girolamo da Pistoia each independently received the same vision of the Virgin Mary cradling her dead son after his crucifixion. They took this as a sign to open a protective shelter under that name. The clerics turned to the Bigallo magistracy and secured the use of an old hospital located in the western S. Maria Novella quarter, a block up from the Arno River on the main street of the Borgo Ognissanti neighborhood. Sixty girls soon swarmed in. Don Antonio was already a member of S. Maria delle Vergine, and he recruited Andrea Biliotti, one of his confraternal brothers, to keep the books. He and Friar Girolamo also enlisted more priests to help in spiritual training and began recruiting a group of women to help them find the funds to run this new shelter.[37]

Looking for a Home

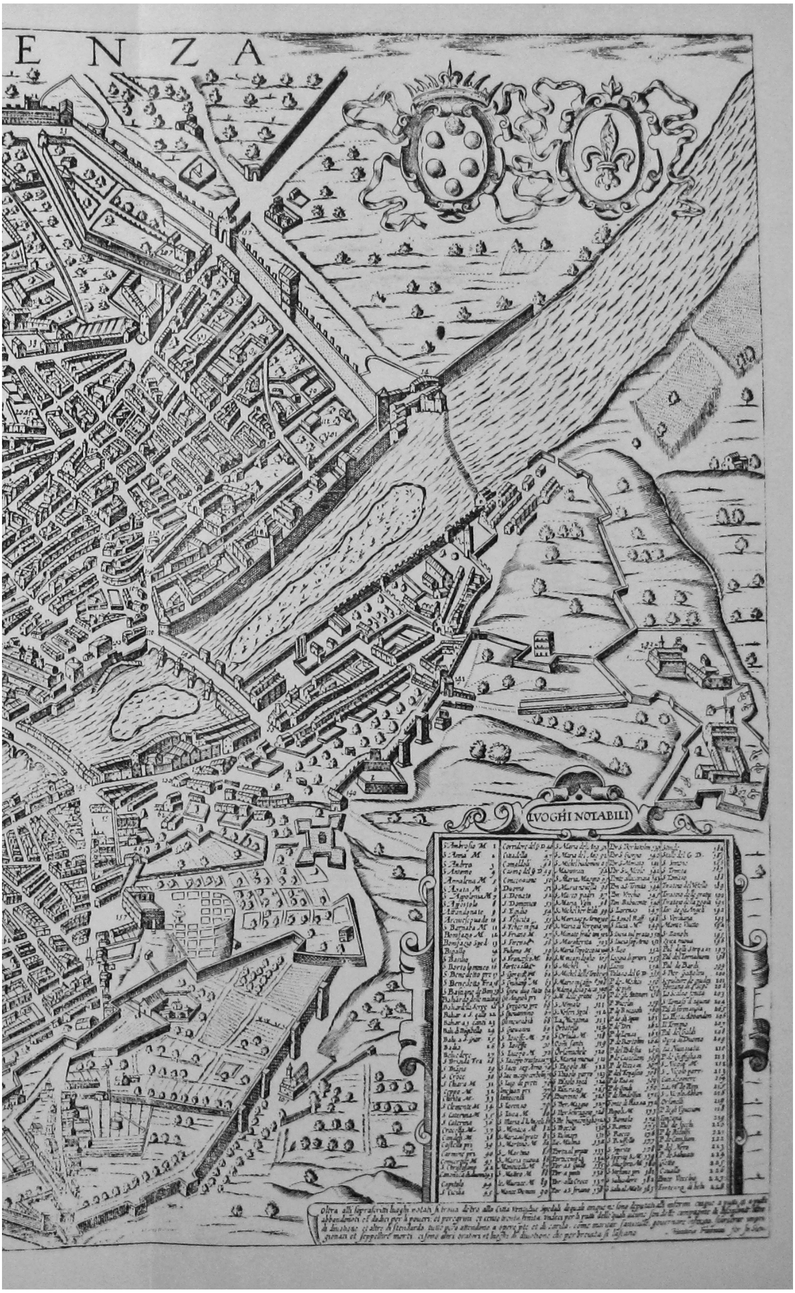
Borgo Ognissanti was an industrial slum. It was one of the toughest neighborhoods in Florence, home to many of those charged with the rapes, assaults, and frauds discussed earlier. At its south end, wool mills hung out over the Arno and gave work and low wages to the washers, fullers, and dyers who turned the river every color of the rainbow as they carried out their trade. To the north was one of the city's most notorious red-light districts—just a few blocks away from the brothel at the Old Market and still the highest concentration of prostitutes anywhere in Florence. The streets teemed with underemployed day laborers, hordes of young apprentices and journeymen, and dozens of turned-out streetwalkers. Rumbling carts rattled past workbenches that had been pulled out into the daylight, and above that a din of voices sounded: bosses giving orders, workers singing or cursing, porters yelling as they delivered goods, children shouting as they came out of crowded homes to play in the street. The bells rang out regularly from churches and from the monastery of Ognissanti, founded by the Benedictine brothers known as Umiliati who came into the area in 1256 and opened the first wool workshops there. These Umiliati were political radicals, which is to say that, along with their industrial work, they actively promoted Florence's republican traditions at a time when Cosimo I was working equally hard to gut the republican dreams of the Renaissance and establish his ducal government. In a few short years, he would turf the Umiliati out and install a more compliant group of Franciscans in the Ognissanti monastery. In short, all of Florence's most active and intense currents of work, money, sex, religion, and politics washed through Borgo Ognissanti. Like an island in the middle of it all was a home for adolescent girls who were, at least temporarily, cut from their familial moorings and in danger of going adrift.

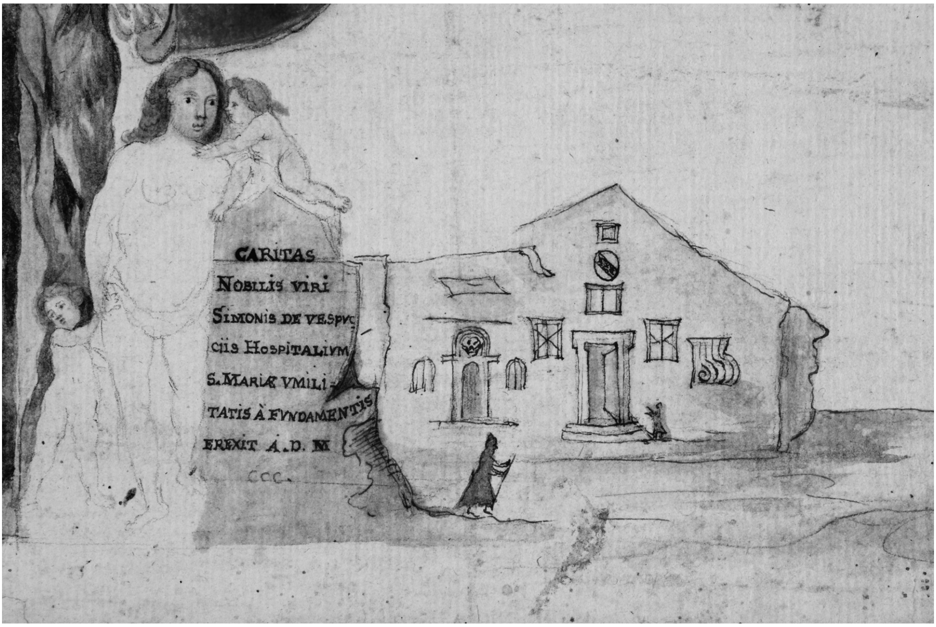
Little of this noise and activity makes it into *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*, which hurries past the messy founding years and heads straight into God's eternal convent plan. The effort to slow down the narrative by looking at other sources generates one of the first puzzling silences surrounding the Pietà, though it's a case in which *The Chronicles* prove largely correct and the silences lie elsewhere. The 1562 census for Florence confirms that there is a shelter with 160 girls and women in the Borgo Ognissanti neighborhood but gives no precise location. *The Chronicles* put it more precisely in the hospital of St. Mary of Humility (S. Maria dell'Umiltà) at the corner of Borgo Ognissanti Street and Via Nuova, claiming that this was rented from the Bigallo magistracy for the large sum of 80 scudi a year. But the Umiltà hospital, likely named in recognition of the Umiliati brothers at the Ognissanti monastery less than a block to the west, was very small. A sixteenth-century sketch (see p. 42) shows a modest one-and-half-story structure.[38] A door opens invitingly in the sketch, perhaps for the pilgrim walking in the foreground. The traveler would enter into the large rectangular hall where Renaissance hospitals commonly lined up their beds against the outside walls. Contemporary reports suggest that the Umiltà hospital had only eighteen beds, which was hardly enough for 160 girls, even if they slept three or four to a bed as most hospital residents did at that time. Beds fit into the half-story above the main hall and into a second hall next door would have eased the pressure, but only slightly, so it is no surprise when *The Chronicles* claim that cramped quarters did eventually force the Pietà to move out of the neighborhood altogether.[39]

The old S. Maria dell'Umiltà hospital had been at that corner for more than 150 years. It was founded in 1382 by Simone di Piero Vespucci, of the Vespucci family of bankers, traders, and textile merchants who had lived on the street for centuries. This was the same family whose son Amerigo (1451–1512) accompanied some of the early voyages across the Atlantic and was so skilled in the allied arts of navigation, cartography, and self-promotion that, in 1507, a German cartographer attached his name to what people were beginning to realize was a new continent. The name stuck. The Vespucci name was also stuck all over the Borgo Ognissanti neighborhood. Within the church of Ognissanti, they had commissioned Florence's leading artist, Dominico Ghirlandaio, to paint a Pietà at their altar just inside the main door (1472–73). Above it Ghirlandaio painted a Madonna of Mercy sheltering members of the Vespucci family under her outstretched cloak, and below this was the Vespucci family tomb. A week before he died in July 1400, Simone Vespucci transferred


FIOR
EVROPA
ASIA
AFRICA
MARE OCEANO
Porta 1
Casa del Capitano 2
Casa d'Offitiali 3
Chiesa 4
Allogg di Soldati 5
Allogg de bombar 6
Luogo d'artiglierie 7
Armaria 8
Granaria 9
Giardino del Capit 11
Casa del Comune 13
Dispensa 14
Mulini 15
153

Map of Sixteenth-Century Florence (Matteo Fiorini, 1600). Attillio Mori & Giuseppe Boffito, *Firenze nelle vedute e piante. Studio storico topografico cartografico.* Firenze: Tipgrafia Giuntina, 1926. Location of Casa della Pietà: 1554–1568 (*bottom circle*) and after 1568 (*top circle*).


ENZA
LVOGHI NOTABILI



S. Maria dell'Umiltà in the Sixteenth Century. Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Fondo Manoscritti 603, inserto no. 28

ownership of the Umiltà hospital to the confraternity of S. Maria del Bigallo, making the lay brothers promise that friars or priests would never have control of it, and that members of the Vespucci family would be favored as its administrators. Like many merchants of the time, Simone Vespucci was deeply suspicious of manipulative and greedy clergy. Not that he was himself free of either manipulation or greed; his canny move also ensured that the Vespucci family could continue to control and benefit from the hospital without actually having to cover its ongoing costs.

Some firsthand testimony lets us see how much the Vespuccis had let the hospital run down by the mid-sixteenth century. The Bigallo magistrates had sent their clerk there while he was compiling a survey of Florentine hospitals in 1543, and his notes read like a transcript of a conversation on the doorstep with the resident warden, Domenico di Martino, who also worked for Florence's silk guild.

> It is held by Domenico di Martino, the messenger for the guild of Por S. Maria.

> He took it over in 1529. Before that the appointment of a warden had been in the care of the Vespucci, then of the Captains of the Bigallo, and then of the house of Medici, that is of Signore Lorenzo and Giuliano.
>
> He says that when he first came here there were 12 beds and 13 pairs of sheets that hadn't been washed in 18 months.
>
> He says that now there are there 18 beds between men and women, and 37 sets of sheets.
>
> He would like to keep it for life, and then when he can't keep it up, to turn it over to his wife on the understanding that Giovanni, the priest of the Bigallo, would also continue his involvement. Giovanni keeps the books because Domenico can't read or write.
>
> He gets 50 lire annually for his work.
>
> He keeps the beds clean and also buys one load of wood annually.
>
> Whenever the laundry needs to be done, he hires a washerwoman at his own expense.
>
> He says the two masses annually for the Feast of the Circumcision.
>
> He found out that this hospital is supposed to have one barrel of oil annually, which it hasn't had except in the past two years, to keep the lights burning in the men's and women's dormitories.
>
> Nothing more to add except that he is extremely poor and has 8 children.[40]

Broken beds and eighteen months without clean laundry: a Renaissance hospital was often where you went to get sick. In fairness, Domenico had come to S. Maria dell'Umiltà in the middle of the devastating siege that broke the last Florentine Republic by 1530. Given the chaos of those times, he may have started out as a squatter, a servant, or a supervisor. He may also have developed into the conscientious warden he painted himself as when speaking to the Bigallo clerk. Yet at some point Domenico and his eight children had to leave and make way for a member of the Vespucci family, Luigi di Giovanbattista. Patron families often kept a hand in these appointments and often used them to provide a home and a job for one of their more shiftless members. Luigi Vespucci seems to have fit this bill. The Bigallo magistrates certainly sniffed trouble because in 1570 they charged Luigi with failing to keep the place up or to offer hospitality as he was required: they wanted him out. Vespucci responded with a well-orchestrated counterattack, offering a three-page itemized list of all that he had spent to maintain and improve the S. Maria dell'Umiltà hospital from 1565 to 1569: three hundred bricks, twelve bushels of mortar, two iron bars for the windows, and so on. At almost 100 scudi, his expenses for renovation were twice what had been required under his agreement with the Bigallo. He added the testimony of sixteen neighbors, ranging from a couple of Franciscan friars at Ognissanti, to the local doctor Elio D'Alessandro Celli, who had lived on the street for eighteen years and passed the ospedale daily, to Santi di Francesco Bastiero, governor of a local confraternity that had rented rooms in the Umiltà from September 1568. All testified in somewhat vague terms that Luigi had offered excellent hospitality and hadn't made money on the side by renting hospital rooms to anyone other than the needy poor.[41]

It's all very persuasive, but one thing is missing. Not one of these witnesses mentions the girls of the Pietà. Luigi Vespucci says nothing about having offered shelter to 160 abandoned girls—by any standard a simple fact that would have halted the Bigallo magistrates' investigation in its tracks. The closest we come is testimonies by a few immediate neighbors noting that he had always lodged poor women (*povere donne*) in the home, although the Pietà girls were much younger than that. Trying to sort through this only multiplies the puzzles. *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* identifies the Bigallo as the landlord and claims that it collected 80 scudi annually in rent. Yet a search of the Bigallo's financial ledgers for the period shows no rental payments. A search of the Pietà's own ledgers also fails to turn up a single rent payment or, for that matter, any confirmation of its location in the Umiltà hospital. The Pietà ledgers do show payments for some of the kinds of renovations that Luigi Vespucci claimed to have undertaken—a window here or a door there—but curiously none ever say where all this is taking place. One ledger comes tantalizingly close—its title page identifies the book as "the ledger of the girls of the Pieta, located in . . ." Three dots and a blank space. How do you hide 160 girls or, for that matter, 80 scudi a year? More to the point, where? And why?

The silence becomes only more puzzling when looking at contemporary chronicles, which say nothing at all of the opening of a new and large shelter for girls in Borgo Ognissanti. Likewise, later histories such as one by Guiseppe Richa, an eighteenth-century antiquarian who wrote an eight-volume work giving detailed accounts of every church and hospital in the city says nothing of the Casa della Pietà. Luigi Passerini, a pioneering nineteenth-century historian who ransacked the archives to construct the first documentary study of all hospitals and schools in Florence, discusses S. Maria dell'Umiltà and even cites Domenico di Martino but says not a word about a shelter for abandoned girls called the Pietà. Subsequent histories of the hospital, including a recent critical work by a professional historian whose work is planted firmly in the archives, carry on the silence.[42]

When in doubt, follow the money. Florence maintained excellent tax records, but as charitable institutions, the Bigallo, S. Maria dell'Umiltà, and the Casa della Pietà were all exempt and indeed do not show up in the thick and heavy volumes of Cosimo I's taxation magistracy, the *Decima Granducale*. Yet these tax records were updated periodically with a census. While the formal presentation copy of the 1562 census is maddeningly vague, the preliminary studies for it are extant and remarkably precise. And there it is. The *Decima Granducale* inventory notes five manuscripts from 1561 as the *Ricerche delle Case di Firenze*, a survey ordered by Cosimo I to determine the taxable value of every property in Florence, regardless of whether taxes were actually paid. Each city quarter gets a volume, with a separate one listing all the city's workshops. The volume for the quarter of S. Maria Novella finally delivers the answer. This *ricerca* moves up and down every street identifying properties by a fixed formula: a house number, the owner, the tenant, the rental value, and the number of residents (listed as "mouths," or *boche*). The formulaic entries carefully note each property in relation to neighboring properties listed just before and just after it in the census, so that nothing can slip by unrecorded:

> #680: Giovanni Battista of Domenico Sermani, next to the one before and to a house of the Bigallo. He lives here himself. Estimated value 20 scudi. 5 mouths.
>
> #681: House of the Bigallo next to that one and to Bartolomeo di Doffo Bartoli, and Bartolomeo di Mariotto Bartoli. The Abandoned Girls [*Abbandonate*] rent it. Estimated value 10 scudi. Mouths appear below.

> #682: House of Bartolomeo of Doffo Bartoli, Bartolomeo of Martiotto Bartoli, and Simone of Luigi Baroli next to that one. It stands at the corner where Via Nuova meets Borgo Ognisanti. The abovementioned Bartoli live there, and in the half that is owned by Simone, the Abandoned Girls. Estimated value 35 scudi. 5 mouths of the Bartoli. The Abandoned Girls: 160 mouths.
>
> #683: House of Francesco da Santa Croce next to that one. The Abandoned Girls rent it. Estimated value and rent 30 scudi. Mouths: see above.[43]

Admittedly, there is no mention of the Casa della Pietà as such, but these are the only entries on Borgo Ognissanti between Via Nuova and Via Fosse that mention the Bigallo and "Abandoned Girls" at all, let alone together, and this corner is precisely the historical location of S. Maria dell'Umiltà. The total rent given is close enough to the rounded figure mentioned in *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*. Some of the Vespucci appear in this census: a male rents out #614 across the street, and a widow presides over a household of four a few doors down at #622. She and her family are the only Vespucci actually living on Borgo Ognissanti at this point.[44] Tracking the footsteps of the census takers up and down the streets of the neighborhood fails to turn up any reference to either S. Maria dell'Umiltà or to Luigi Vespucci, its supposedly resident *spedalingo*. Since this is a census and not a tax record, they ought to be there. Certainly, many other houses and hospitals in the area that are owned by religious institutions or used for charitable purposes appear in this list even though they are absent from the tax rolls. Every one of these tax-exempt "religious" properties appears in the *ricerca* with a cross beside it, including the "Abandoned Girls" at #682.

The census *ricerca* was part of a citywide bureaucratic exercise related to tax collection. Without assuming the objectivity of all state records, we can believe that they would be more reliable than the oral testimony that a wealthy man from a powerful family gets from his neighbors while defending himself against fraud charges, and more reliable than a chronicle written decades later. While the census *ricerca* does, in the end, support *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* on the location of the first home of the Casa della Pietà, the effort to check this relatively simple fact runs into silences that stir up a host of new and unanticipated questions: Why do other records say nothing at all or seem even to contradict it? What was Luigi Vespucci up to, and why were his sixteen witnesses so economical with the truth? What controversy might lead them to cover up the existence of a shelter for some of the most vulnerable girls in Florence? What about the small details on which census and chronicle diverge: how many girls lived in the shelter? Why does the census refer to the "Abandoned Girls" and not use the name of the Pietà? Why do Bigallo and Pietà ledgers have no record of rent payments?

The Chronicles claim that sixty girls lived in the home, and at eighteen beds that would have put the Pietà at capacity. Yet the census almost triples this number. Which figure was it? The difference could, of course, just be a simple mistake made by Abbess Maria Teresa Petrucci when she copied the sixteenth-century chronicle. If we can track the number of girls coming into the home, we might get a better idea of who enters it and possibly even why. All homes were supposed to keep entrance records, but not all of them did, and what remains in the archives isn't always complete. S. Maria delle Vergine has records only for a few years, from 1552 to 1556, but these allow us to see that eighty-eight girls that entered through those four years—or less than half of what the Pietà enrolled in its first year alone. Only about eighteen girls lived in the privileged Virgins shelter at any one time. The St. Nicholas record picks up only later, in 1570, but stretches for a longer period into 1621; at this point, roughly fifty to sixty girls lived in this shelter on the east side of town.[45]

While it was poorer than either of these two homes, the Pietà kept better records of the girls coming in its doors. Its archives hold two manuscript registers: one for the years 1554–59, and the other for 1558–1623.[46] These are the volumes that give us the scraps of information about girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena encountered in the previous chapter. Each register contains roughly one hundred folio pages. The first bears the title "Secret Book" (*Libro Segreto*) and a large "A" on its leather cover. The second register, bearing a large "B" has the simpler title "Book of the young girls of the pieta" (*Libro delle fanciulle della pieta*). In these two registers, the Pietà scribes Andrea Biliotti, Pier Giorgio Ughi, and Giovanni Bencini wrote the names of each girl who entered according to a set formula: a number, a date, the girl's name together with that of her father or mother, her age, and the note, "Accepted into the home by the Prioresses and women of our Company of the Pieta." Biliotti, Ughi, and Bencini spaced out the entries down the page so that they would be able to update them as necessary: when a girl was sent out to domestic service, when she was returned to her family, when and where she died.

The general statistics are easy enough to extract. The Secret Book lists 361 girls entering from 1554 to 1559. The second book opens by first repeating the entries for the 171 of those girls who are living in the home in December 1559 and then carries on to accumulate 719 more names by 1623. So almost one thousand girls passed through the Casa della Pietà in these decades. The second volume refers to a third called the "New Book" (*Libro Nuovo*), which is now lost. The two surviving manuscript registers are thin and their entries telegraphic, but when taken as a whole, they offer the first and best way of entering into the life of the Pietà and its girls, clearing up some of the puzzles.

The picture that emerges from their pages is a little startling, particularly when put it next to that of the S. Maria delle Vergine and S. Niccolò homes. There were often more than 160 girls crammed into the old Umilità hospital and the two houses that Pietà rented on either side of it. Working only with the 361 girls in the Secret Book, we find that the average age for a girl entering the Pietà was just more than twelve years old, though the youngest had been three and one came in at thirty years old. Many came from families that had very shallow roots in Florence: unmarried girls were identified by reference to a parent, and that parent by reference to either an occupation or a place. Hence, Margerhita di Giovanni Tessitore (weaver) or Alessandra di Marco da Pontessieve. In that latter case, Marco might have been among the flood of workers migrating every year into the city, or he might have already lived in Florence for years. That he was known still at his death by reference to his hometown shows that his neighbors hadn't entirely accepted him as a Florentine. Just more than 60 percent of Pietà girls came from families like that.[47]

Most of these girls stayed in the Pietà for a little more than four years, although here too the average hides a broad range, extending from two weeks to fifty-eight years. The average age at which they left was just shy of seventeen, and while the range extended from three to sixty-nine years, the median age was sixteen. The smallest handful of girls left the

Pietà on the arm of a husband. Somewhat more returned to their families—roughly half to their mothers, who had either gotten back on their feet, perhaps convincing a new husband to take in the once-abandoned girl, or been widowed a second time. We simply don't know. Only five returned to fathers, and the rest to aunts, uncles, grandparents, or even sisters or brothers. Many of these girls might eventually marry. Almost seventy girls went into private homes as domestic servants. The money they earned would become a dowry that their employer would put into the hands of the husband he had chosen for them. Only one went to a convent. Seven had taken matters into their own hands and simply run away from the crowded complex at the corner of Via Nuova and Borgo Ognissanti. But all of these added together don't make up even half of the girls who had entered the home. The largest number, almost 60 percent, simply didn't make it out alive. Most didn't have long to live in the Pietà: of those registered in the Secret Book, 45 died within six months of entering, 67 within a year, 110 within two years, and 127 within three.[48]

Could these just be the home's difficult early years? In fact, when we look ahead into the second register, it's clear that things initially got much worse. The Pietà remained in Borgo Ognissanti for another eight years, and in that time, an additional 165 girls entered. For this group, the average entering age dropped a year, to eleven. The number who became servants, who married, or who returned to their families also dropped. The only number that rose was the percentage who died: almost 70 percent. The Pietà only turned a corner when it finally moved out of Borgo Ognissanti in late 1568. Of the 526 girls who had entered in the fourteen years the Pietà had spent at Borgo Ognissanti, only 202 would walk out alive.[49]

The questions pile up. Were girls in S. Maria delle Vergine and S. Niccolò as vulnerable? Their records suggest not—their girls were a little older when they entered and far fewer died: a little more than 11 percent at the former and just under 20 percent at the latter.[50] Were these unhealthy times? The early 1550s were pretty tough years, with almost continual famine, made worse when Duke Cosimo I directed vast resources into an expensive war against Siena from 1554 to 1559. Yet even more girls were dying in the 1560s, which were comparatively good. Was this an unhealthy place? Low lying and subject to floods, such as the devastating flood of 13 September 1557 (the worst in Florence before the catastrophic flood of 4 November 1966), crowded, poor Borgo Ognissanti indeed wasn't one of the healthiest districts in Renaissance Florence. Anyone living there faced malaria and worse. As a working-class district, it absorbed even more people when times were tough. Yet mortality rates that had spiked upward in the 1550s had settled down to normal by the 1560s. By the mid-1560s, the Pietà was expanding into more properties, including the only house in the neighborhood that actually had its own garden—left to the girls by one of their neighbors in his will.

If neither the times nor the location provides an answer, then we need to look inside the home to see what conditions were like and what the girls did day to day. As new information emerges from the Pietà's own letters, ledgers, and records, we also need to look back to reinterrogate and reevaluate what we have already found in *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* and in the entrance registers. We need to think again about Braccio's Pierina, Whore #19, and the wild characters making their way through the plays of Antonfrancesco Grazzini.

What was killing the girls of the Pietà? Many questions dangle around this one and may or may not be related: Why did those keeping the first entry register label it a "Secret Book"? Why, two years after they had moved out of S. Maria dell'Umiltà, did no one want to acknowledge that they had even been there—not their embattled landlord Vespucci, not the Bigallo that had collected the rent, and not even neighbors like Dr. Celli or the Ognissanti friars? What was going on inside the Casa della Pietà?

CHAPTER THREE

Renaissance Teenagers

Working Girls

I must speak of the Mulberry, for it leads into the great discourse of the Silk-worm, another of the greatest commodities of Tuscany.

In the two months of May and June this worm labours. The rest of the year they are only seeds kept in some warm & close places, safe from cold and thunder. Either of these destroys them. Once the worm has spun herself into a cocoon, they put it into warm water to find the end. If they want to preserve the worm for seed, they must find the end without putting the cocoon into water, for this kills the worm. They then let the worm lie upon a woollen cloth until it becomes a fly and mates with another, from which come infinite seeds. At the beginning of May they are laid in the sun and so hatched. But if there is not enough heat, or if they want to start them sooner, the women will hatch them in their bosoms.

As soon as they are worms, mulberry leaves are given to them, for on this alone they feed. The great Duke has planted many mulberry trees along the banks of the Arno, and in the moats of towns and in other public places. Within a few years there will be thirty thousand ducats worth of leaves produced annually. And whereas until now the silk-workers of Florence bought their raw silk from Naples, Lombardy, and Greece, they shall soon have enough of their own. It is thought that there are yearly made in Florence high quality woolen cloths worth two million ducats, and silk and gold and silver embroidered cloths worth another three million. The Florentines have to increase this production by all possible means, or I do not see how they will be able to pay for goods from other countries: Corn from Sicily, Leather from Barbary, Tin, Lead, Herring, Caviar, and other such provisions from England. Their state does not have any merchandise to sell, except a little Alum, to offset the great expense of these imports. The Florentines' hope lies in an industrious effort in making these silks, their embroidered clothes of gold and silver, and their fine woolens.

—Sir Robert Dallington, *A Survey of the Great Duke's State of Tuscany*

* * *

What were 160 girls doing crammed inside the Casa della Pietà? Working. The details of what, how, and when might change, but the why never did. It was the only way to bridge the wide gap between the coins that trickled in as donations and those that flooded out to buy food, medicine, shoes, and shirts or to pay the baker, the doctor, or the priest. But even beyond the work that earned the girls and their home some *lire* or *soldi,* there were also the ongoing chores: the clothes to be mended, the soup to be made, the floors to be cleaned. Domenico di Martino, the former warden of S. Maria dell'Umiltà, might send his sheets out to a washerwoman, but the girls of the Pietà never did.

The three houses at the corner of Borgo Ognissanti and Via Nuova held more than beds and tables. Spread around and between them, up into the attics and out into the courtyard, were reels for unraveling silk cocoons, spinning wheels for turning raw wool into thread, and looms for weaving some of these threads into cloth. The Pietà was like a factory, with dozens of girls working hard to produce the threads and textiles that English traveler Sir Robert Dallington claimed were necessary if Florence, too, was to maintain its balance of payments. Ledgers of the 1550s and 1560s show the Pietà purchasing the machines, tools, and protective clothing used for textile work. They record the coming and going of jobbers such as Francesco detto il Naso—Franky "the Nose"—who worked for textile shops in the surrounding streets of Borgo Ognissanti, and who passed on all sorts of piecework for the girls to do: silk cocoons to be unraveled and then spun on reels into skeins of thread and washed or bales of carded wool fibers to be spun into thread and then passed on to weavers. The wool masters in Borgo Ognissanti and the silk entrepreneurs headquartered a few blocks east, just off the Ponte Vecchio, likely saw the arrival of well over a hundred young work-ready girls in the neighborhood as a godsend. It was certainly easier sending work in bulk to the Pietà's door. They were so starved for the income that you could likely push the price down a bit too. But what about the view from inside? Textile manufacturing could be demanding, intense, and unhealthy. Was it possible that the Pietà could have been literally working the girls to death?

How important was the work of girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena to the Pietà's bottom line? Perhaps if there was not enough work during the day, then there would not be enough food to put on those tables that had just been cleared of piles of cloth in the evening. We can start by attempting to understand what the girls did, and where they did it, calculating how much income it brought in and setting that income against overall expenses. Did their work cover the costs for food, clothing, medicine, and whatever else they needed? This search starts in ledgers of income and expense, and as we scan their lines and tally the numbers, we gain a better idea of the work conditions and day-to-day life for the teenage girls in the Pietà. Then, with Robert Dallington's advice in mind, we can see how the Pietà girls weren't simply working for their own survival but also for the survival of Florence itself.

Girls on the Streets and in Service

Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena likely worked from the first day that they arrived at the Pietà. Much of their time was spent preparing food, washing laundry, and cleaning floors. Few homes paid staff to do things that the girls could do themselves, and the Pietà was no exception. Even in larger hospitals the line between patients and staff was shaky. With no system of pensions, little savings, and few old-age homes, such as the Orbatello, older people with limited options might deed all their property to a hospital, and then move in and take up residence. Working as nurses, cleaners, or gardeners, they gradually moved from the volunteer staff to permanent patients as their health declined. There was nothing exceptional here, since even hospital wardens such as Domenico di Martino did this, moving in with his entire family and making the hospital's work something of a family business. It certainly happened at the Pietà, though the ones moving in were initially widows.

The first prioress to greet the first girls entering in 1554 during the dead of winter was Mona Margherita, widow of Lionardo Boninsegni. She was likely standing at the door more out of charity than need, since she came from a wealthy family and moved on within a few months. When the Pietà had gotten on its feet, Mona Alessandra, widow of a woodworker, Girolamo, and apparently without children of her own, came to take Mona Margherita's place as the resident prioress. In Mona Alessandra, need and charity combined. Apparently indomitable and certainly dedicated, she kept at her post for the next thirty years, until she died in 1583. Even then she did not entirely leave the Pietà because the girls buried her by the altar in a chapel that the Pietà maintained in the nearby Dominican monastery of S. Marco. She was constantly at the doorway, in the office, and up and down the halls, keeping a close eye on the accounts and on the girls to make sure that neither got out of line. At her death, the job fell to a woman who had lived at the Pietà all her life. Brigida Pesilli was almost sixty and had first come to the Pietà as an eighteen-year-old girl in 1556. Brigida served twenty years, and the woman who succeeded her in the job had followed her into the Pietà decades before. Caterina, daughter of Piero the woodworker, had entered the Pietà only six months after Brigida, though she was only eleven at the time. Like Brigida, she never left. Woodworker Piero was either afraid for Caterina's morals or unable to cope with the prospect of raising a teenage daughter when his job wouldn't allow him to keep a constant eye on her. For all the isolation of living her entire life within the conservatory walls, Caterina learned a lot from Mona Alessandra and Brigida, and the Pietà scribe reflected after she died, "Chaterina was prioress of this place, a teacher at the looms, and the smartest of women—good with accounts, able to read and write, with good judgement, and very useful for our house."[1]

What's remarkable is that all the Pietà's resident prioresses for the first sixty years, from its opening in 1554 until Caterina's death in 1613, came from the small band of women who first entered the home in those early years at Borgo Ognissanti. It was a familiar process: girls moved from washing the laundry to keeping the books—and possibly laundering them as well—in a pattern that had characterized life in charitable institutions and convents for centuries already and would carry on into the future. The easiest way to cut costs on salaries was to train the girls to take over the work. Yet the shelter that Caterina took over in 1601 was quite different from the one that Mona Alessandra had come to a half-century earlier.

Resident prioresses Mona Alessandra, Brigida, and Caterina didn't just oversee the books; they had to worry about whether there would be anything to write in them. This was where the other side of work came in. Pietà girls like Brigida and Caterina worked to earn money for their home, and by the time they took on the job of resident prioress, they had done everything that a Pietà girl could be expected to take on. All Florentine girls expected to work from the time they were at least six or seven years old, regardless of whether they lived with parents, other relations, or in an institution. In small family settings, it was fathers, mothers, uncles, or others who found the work and supervised it, and this work was often critical to the family's survival. In a big institution, paying work was even more important, but the home's greater size made it a bigger challenge to find enough for all the girls to do—and to earn.

The challenge was immediate: in the year that it opened, it took just over 6,000 lire to keep the Pietà running. The amount jumped to 9,000 lire a year later, then to 10,000, and finally to about 12,000 lire in the final years at Borgo Ognissanti. These were years when you could buy a bushel of grain in Florence for about 2 and a half lire, a barrel of wine for just over 3 lire, and a barrel of olive oil for under 16 lire. A weaver could outfit himself with a new loom for 50–100 lire and look to earn about 300 lire annually with it if he worked hard. Most artisans took home only 150 to 200 lire in a year, and from that they fed, sheltered, and clothed whole families.[2] So the Pietà's operating costs were colossal sums for an institution with no endowment, no property, and no investments. The money to cover them came in from various sources: patrons of the sponsoring confraternity, the Company of Compassion, or Compagnia della Pietà, initially covered about a quarter of costs through annual pledges. But their contributions decreased year after year even as expenses skyrocketed. Other donations made up a little over half of the costs. Some came from other institutions like churches, convents, and monasteries that were glad that they no longer had to care for girls like this on their own. They made up for it by giving regular subsidies of a few hundred lire—by any reckoning a real savings over what they had spent in the past.

The bulk of the money came from collection boxes that were posted at the doors of churches for worshipers to slip a coin into when leaving prayers or mass, or that were carried around the streets of Florence by the girls themselves at least three times a week. This is the kind of work that the future prioress Caterina di Piero, entering at age eleven, would almost certainly have done, partly out of advertising and partly out of necessity. Having little children pushing the collection boxes in front of shopkeepers, artisans, and churchgoers drove home the message that the Pietà sheltered weak and vulnerable girls that all Florentines were responsible for. The watchful eye of a widow, Mona Loretta, hired by the

Pietà as the collectors' chaperone, kept children like Caterina safe and on track.[3] Still shy of puberty, they didn't yet have the kind of physical figures that would attract the stares and catcalls of journeymen, the leers of masters, and the whispers of passersby. They were also less likely to make a dash for freedom by disappearing into the crowds with the cashbox in their hands.

Sometimes the girls collected the small silver and copper coins that Florentines kept in their purses and exchanged in the marketplace. At the level of the streets, Florence was also a cashless, barter society where people still used barrels of oil, baskets of bread, or bushels of chestnuts to cover debts, services, and salaries. The Pietà was no different: at one point, it paid for twelve new industrial aprons with a few bushels of bran. Food was the most immediate currency of the poor, and the girls hauled it back to the old Umiltà hospital in cloth sacks. Sometimes larger amounts came as gifts from a patrician's estate outside the city, and in that case, his own servants might deliver it directly. More often, girls like the eleven-year-old Caterina traveled the streets with canvas sacks as the markets were finishing for the day and got the bits and pieces that stallholders couldn't sell: ends of bread, meat on the verge of rancidity, fruit and vegetables that wouldn't make it to the next market day and that the vendor could afford to throw away. Or they went door to door, picking up bits of food that families had no use for or that cooks couldn't work with. Back at the Pietà, the girls would cook it together into stews, not unlike the modern *ribollita* soup of stale bread, legumes, and vegetables that frugal Florentines historically made to avoid throwing out old food and that now turn up on restaurant menus as choice tuscan cuisine. Fresh or stale, Mona Alessandra and her staff assigned a cash value to all donated food so that it could be entered into the ledgers and then appear on the balance sheet. This was in part to prevent them from skimming off some of these donations so that they could turn around and resell them—the easiest, but by no means the only, way to launder the books and line their own pockets.

Of all the thousands of lire it took to run the Pietà year after year, food consumed 90 percent of the expenses. Yet the bushels of bran, barrels of wine, and sacks of rotting vegetables and dried-up bread that donors large and small pushed their way represented only a little more than a fifth of the home's income, so Mona Alessandra was in a constant race to find enough food and money to keep girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena from starving. Apart from the declining amounts that the members of the Compagnia della Pietà pledged year to year, cash alms big and small brought in a further two-fifths. This meant that all the gifts of all sorts still left the Pietà with less than three-quarters of what it needed to meet its daily expenses.

One way of filling the gap was to turn around and send the girls back out of the home. Homes like the Pietà sometimes aimed to loosen donors' purse strings by threatening to turn the adolescent girls out on the street, but it was an empty threat: girls were more likely to starve indoors with their honor intact than to be pushed into streets that held little prospect beyond prostitution. The whole point of the Pietà was to keep the street at bay. The alternative that Mona Alessandra reached for was one that individual families, relatives, and guardians had seized on long before when faced with the challenge of housing an abandoned or orphaned girl: she sent girls out on contract as domestic servants in the homes of artisans, widows, and professionals. The girls sent out were still considered part of the Pietà community, but they lived under their new master's roof. More important, they ate at the master's table and wore the clothes the master provided. Employing orphanage girls was both a charitable and practical act.

Almost one in seven of the girls who entered the Pietà in the decade and a half when it was on Borgo Ognissanti turned around and went out again at some point as servants.[4] The Pietà did not rush into this, choosing not to send the first girl out until ten months after it first opened. It may not have had much of a choice because in those desperate times of famine and fever in 1555 there couldn't have been many Florentines eager to add another mouth to the ones around their table. The first to go, ten-year-old Agnioletta, headed almost directly into the home of Marietta Gondi, head of the Compagnia della Pietà that ran the home. A month later it was Margherita, among the first to enter the home and, at twenty, the oldest girl there.[5] Through 1556, the numbers began gradually to swell as more girls old and young headed out to work in another home. Sometimes the ledger sheds light on the hopes they went out with. It was more than just a matter of getting food into them. Domenica, the daughter of Biagio of San Gimigniano, was among the first girls to enter the Pietà, and after two years, at age thirteen, she was signed up for a nine-year contract as a servant in an artisan's home. Fourteen-year-old Daria got a four-year contract, while seventeen-year-old Costanza was signed up for a thirteen-year contract. The contracts for Domenica and Daria were meant to end in marriage, with their master providing shelter, food, and clothing through the length of the term, and a dowry—and possibly a husband—as the final payment at the end. Costanza was already at marriageable age, and a contract as long as hers was more likely a substitute for marriage than a preparation for it.[6]

But whether nine years, four, or thirteen, these contracts are all a little abstract because many of these girls returned to the Pietà within a few months or years. Did they quit, or were they fired? The records don't say, but the pattern was no different than what servants experienced across Italy. The servants in Antonfrancesco Grazzini's plays are savvy, confident, and almost always far more intelligent than their masters. In reality, servants had a pretty unsteady life and most simply didn't stay with a single master for a long time. It was common across Europe to stay for a year and then move on. Yet sometimes a master kicked servants out if he suspected them of stealing, if they were lazy or rude, or if sex began complicating relationships with other servants or family members. Sometimes female servants fled if the master was too demanding with chores, too harsh with discipline, too cheap with food and clothes, or too interested in ways they didn't appreciate.[7]

Almost seventy Pietà girls used domestic service as a way out of the home, but more than a third of these returned, sometimes within weeks, and sometimes repeatedly.[8] A few girls bounced back and forth, such as Domenica, daughter of Michelino Metignoli from the town of Ancisa. Domenica came into the Pieta at age fifteen, and within weeks, went out to be a servant with a tailor. She broke her eight-year contract and returned to the Pieta after two years. This began a string of contracts: with the hose maker Domenico Ubaldini, who sent her home after three years, and with Madonna Alessandra Scarlata, who did the same. Each of these three employers paid Domenica a small annual sum on the understanding that the "real" payoff of marriage and dowry would come with completion of the contract. But Domenica never made it to the end of a contract, and when she was thirty-one, a notary, Francesco Boccardi, took her on for an indefinite term as a professional housekeeper. That, too, fell apart, and Domenica eventually returned to the Pietà for good, dying there at age sixty-four.[9] Yet Domenica was exceptional; other girls never went out again after breaking their contracts and either died as she did back in the Pietà home or left to live with a mother, a brother, or an uncle.

What did these girls do? Some went to work with widows, with notaries, or with doctors and did the kind of cooking and cleaning that servants anywhere did day in and day out. Yet by far the largest number of girls—almost a third—headed out to work with weavers or tailors or some other master who was active in the cloth trade. Since the records don't always specify, the real number could have been higher.[10] Sometimes it was straightforward service on the usual terms, with the promise of a husband and dowry at the end of the term. Yet a girl with some training in textile work, who came as a servant into the household of a weaver, would inevitably end up spinning wool into thread, helping set threads on the looms, and perhaps even doing some of the weaving. Some Florentine masters recognized this by promising an apprenticeship, like Agostino di Berto who offered six years training in the art of weaving draperies to Betta di Pagolo, or wool master Filippo da Bologna promising five years instruction to Nannia of Stefano da Romita.[11]

A few of these apprentice-servant relationships also fell apart and the girls returned to the Pietà. Betta left Agostino after two years, while Nannia was out of Filippo's house within two weeks. They may have been exploited, and they may have been inept. One of those definitely exploited was Agniolina, sent to the Pietà at age eight by her father, Giorgio da Nunchiano. After ten years, she was hired as a servant by a medical doctor Mario Giovanni Botti, who promised the usual nine years of work followed by a marriage and a dowry. Yet alongside housekeeping, Botti immediately set Agniola to work weaving cloths, which he then sold on the market, pocketing the profits. When their agreement broke down after four years, Agniola decided she'd been robbed. She took Botti to the Officials of the *Grascia*, Florence's supervisors of markets and trades who checked the quality and set the prices of all the wool and linen cloths sold in the city, claiming that he owed her more. A young woman without family couldn't have launched this suit without the help of the Pietà, and within two months, she'd won a ruling requiring Botti to pay her the full value of the finished cloths.[12] But these were exceptions: of the twenty-nine girls who went to work with wool weavers or tailors, only eight returned to the Pietà, a slightly better percentage than those who'd gone off into service generally.

A Pietà girl was clearly a valuable resource to these textile workers, particularly if she had lived in the home long enough to pick up some of the skills of the trade. She was a particularly good catch for any weaver's widow who might be struggling to keep her shop in business. The Pietà adolescent was trained and easier to manage than a male journeyman who might not like taking orders from a woman, and who might have ambitions to take over the shop. So Domenica di Bernardino da Siena, aged sixteen and already eight years in the Pietà, went to work with Mona Margherita, widow of Antonio Maria and a weaver of woolen cloths. Camilla di Lorenzo Palazzuolo from the Romagna was younger—eleven and only a year in the Pietà—when she went to assist the widowed weaver Maria Domenica. This could unexpectedly backfire if the Pietà failed to check closely enough into those doing the hiring: in March 1560, thirteen-year-old Antonia di Marco Dalloro was sent off to work in the home and wool shop of a widow, Domenica. A few weeks later she was back because, as it turned out, Domenica was actually Domenico, a male weaver whose ruse fell apart pretty quickly.[13] Apart from this, girls seemed better off when they went to work with a widow-weaver, since none of them ever returned to the Pietà.

Teenage Spinsters—Working in Wool

That Pietà girls were in demand as servants in cloth-working households shows how tightly woven their work in and out of the home could actually be. But there was one problem: sending a girl out as a servant didn't bring money back to the home. It might help the girl establish a life for herself outside the home, but it didn't help the Pietà to feed the dozens of Margheritas, Marias, and Maddalenas she had left behind. As Mona Alessandra and her patrons aimed to bridge the gap between income and expense, they realized that paid piecework in the textile industry would provide the most reliable source of funds. The fortunes of many of Florence's families had been built on fine wools and silks, and the city's high-quality cloths were in demand across Europe. Yet sixteenth-century wool and silk merchants faced more intense international competition that forced them to look for new ways of organizing production and cutting their costs, and this was where the Pietà girls entered in. A Pietà girl might be a sloppy housekeeper or indifferent cook, but increasingly she was a professionally trained textile worker. This was precisely why so many weavers wanted to hire them to work as servant-assistants in their homes and workshops. It did not take long for the Pietà to begin setting the girls to work on its own behalf.

The Pietà organized itself as a factory within a few months after it opened, probably because it became clear that donations alone would not keep it afloat. That first summer in 1555 a widow with training and experience as a wool weaver was brought in as an unpaid member of the community specifically to train the girls in weaving. The Pietà gave Mona Betta room and board and a place for her seven-year-old daughter, Vettoria. A month later, Caterina di Antonio joined them on the same terms. Betta and Caterina spent the days organizing the younger girls to spin raw wool into thread with a distaff and spinning wheels. That both were trained weavers suggests that the Pietà also brought in looms that first summer to get the older girls, particularly those who came from families of weavers, working at this more profitable side of the business. Only small looms could have fit in the old Umiltà hospital, already crammed with well over a hundred girls. Yet if they could generate more income, space had to be found for them.

Mona Betta lasted only half a year. She left in February 1556 after falling seriously ill, and her daughter Vettoria had to leave with her. Eighteen months later, Mona Betta lay dying in Florence's S. Maria Nuova hospital, and Vettoria disappears from view. This left only Caterina, so the Pietà called back Maddalena, one of the girls who'd been sent out to apprentice with a weaver. Though she was only thirteen, she set about organizing and teaching the girls as Caterina's assistant. The arrangement didn't last long because a little more than a year later Caterina also fell ill and went off to S. Maria Nuova, refusing to return once she had recovered. This left only Maddalena. In some desperation, the Pietà now brought in Brigida di Nicolo Mignuaio, who, at eighteen was barely older than the girls themselves. By May 1557, the whole textile operation and the profitability of the home was essentially in the hands of two barely trained girls, one fourteen and one eighteen. And this became the new pattern: instead of hiring experienced adult supervisors, the Pietà called back girls who had been apprenticed to weavers so that they could start teaching and supervising the work of other girls in the home's crowded halls and rooms. For many of the girls, this work was hardly strange. A few were the daughters of weavers, and many more had come from homes in which a mother, an aunt, or a grandmother earned some extra income by spinning raw wool into thread.

They did remarkably well. In the chaos of the troubled first year, the girls earned just under 600 lire. They more than tripled that figure the next year and pushed it over 3,800 three years after that, the largest single source of income on the balance sheet and equal to the annual earnings of about fifteen professional weavers.[14]

What work was it? Who commissioned it? How much space did it take in the home? What did it mean in the lives of individual girls? Only if we determine this can we sort out whether the Pietà was the kind of unhealthy workplace that endangered the health and even the lives of its girls. The civic census records about 160 girls living in the trio of houses at Via Nuova and Borgo Ognissanti around 1562. As it happens, one of the most complete records of work in the Pietà archives covers a period of roughly a year, 1565–66.[15] Where sometimes the ledgers give only general entries that name the price and the contractor but not much else, this volume seems to have been intended from the start to be a detailed record precisely of the girls' textile piecework. The quarto-size manuscript with three leather straps sewn across the spine as reinforcements has all the signs of an ambitious effort to get a grip on accounts. Across the top the word "*Giornale*" suggests it records the daily flow of money in and out of the home. In the cover's center, an "A" in a circle suggests it is the first of a new series. The opening line inside reads, "*This book is of the girls of the Pieta and is called Daybook A, kept by me*—here there is a blank space—*one of the those girls*."[16] Two distinct hands filled the pages inside. One clearly and deliberately recorded accounts from 1 November 1565 through the spring and summer of 1566. This hand was not, as it turns out, that of a Pietà girl at all, but belonged to Giovanni Bencini, who succeeded to Paolo di Giorgio Ughi that year and who clearly was eager to turn over a new leaf in accounts. Bencini assigned a new page to each of the tradesmen who brought work regularly to the home, and the ample pages he left between each one's record suggests his optimism that the Pietà would be able to record many years work between the covers of this ledger. Amounts of wool or cloth, operations, and payments are all listed together with the costs for equipment and repairs: lire 1.6.8 for an industrial apron, a little over a lire to fix a big bronze pot, and 21 lire to buy a new one, 3s4d to buy some of the reels used to unwind silk cocoons.[17] These records of textile work run out sometime in the summer of 1566. The notebook then lay around unused for four years before someone new—possibly the unnamed Pietà girl who announced her intentions to record daily expenses on the first page—picked it up to use for tracking all sorts of daily expenses, chiefly food. These accounts fill every spare page in the ledger but have nothing to do with textile work.

Dissecting the textile accounts allows us to separate out the different kinds of work and lets us see where the Pietà girls fit into the Florentine cloth industry. The range of what they did was impressive. They worked in every facet of the industry—wool, silk, and hemp—and performed different operations in each one. Most often they worked for textile masters, but sometimes they worked on their own.[18]

Wool was a far more complex industry than silk. Many more hands went into turning raw fleeces into finished cloths, and these were often highly trained hands. In Renaissance Florence, this also meant that they were male hands, particularly at the more profitable or advanced stages of production where men protected their privileged roles with trade legislation, production rules, and the myth that women lacked the skills and strength for the job. Women and girls could be left with more repetitive, basic, and low-paying work. As bales of fleeces made their way into the city, they didn't simply move from workshop to workshop across the city; they moved from men to women and back to men again.[19]

The fleeces came into Florence as raw as when they had been sheared in Spain or England, where sheep produced a better wool than in Tuscany. They were sorted and dumped into huge vats of lightly soapy water, where pairs of washers (*lavatori*) passed them back and forth with poles to clean them lightly before rinsing them in the Arno and hanging them up to dry slowly on the large metal braces fastened outside all the houses up and down the length of Borgo Ognissanti—all this happened right outside the Pietà's door. Other men then lifted down the fleeces and checked to see that the light washing and slow drying had preserved the natural oils necessary to comb and spin the fibers without breaking. Knots, hide, and impurities were then picked out by hand, and the fleeces were beaten and oiled to prepare them for combing and carding. Combing produced worsted yarn (*stame*) that was used as warp threads in the weaving process, and the leftover short hairs were then carded with metal brushes to produce the wool yarn (*lana*) used in the weft threads. Once combed or carded, the wool was ready to be spun into thread by women. Men handled most of these steps of washing and oiling, combing and carding. And men then choreographed the rest of the process: wool merchants hired jobbers called *lanini* to handle the movement of carded fleeces and woolen yarn and *stamaiuoli* to do the same with combed fleeces and worsted yarn. They sought out women as spinners in the city but especially in the countryside, identifying individual women here and there who would could take on the work and turn it around quickly. Merchants usually worked with one *lanino* and a few *stamaiuoli* at a time, and these jobbers themselves might be working with a few merchants, though only if they could locate enough spinners.[20]

The ducal government had fixed the terms and wages for wool industry workers in regulations of 1547, 1556, and 1557, determining who owned the wool at each stage, what prices had to be paid to those who worked on it, and what percentage commission the jobber could take. Having carded wool spun into thread would cost a merchant 14 soldi per pound, with 12 soldi going to the spinner and 2 to the *lanino*. Spinning combed wool cost 2 lire per pound with 1.15 going to the spinner and 5 soldi to the stamaiuolo.[21] The big price difference reflected the work involved. Spinning combed wool paid almost three times more than carded wool because it was more labor intensive: a girl took the combed wool in a distaff and then spun it by hand. She needed little space and few tools but far more time to produce a quantity of thread. Girls working with carded wool could use a spinning wheel, and so they worked through the weights of wool far more quickly. They also required more space, though the wheels were small and portable, and so they could fit into odd spaces in the hospital or be brought out into the courtyard when the weather warmed up.

The jobbers for combed wool and those for carded wool both had to be able to read, write, and keep accounts: they weighed the wool carefully at each stage, marked bales and threads precisely, and kept track of who owed what to whom. And both stopped at the Pietà's door. The advantage to the Pietà was that it didn't have to pay for the raw materials: the jobber shouldered that cost while the Pietà provided only the labor. Jobbers paid market rates and they paid cash. The advantage to the jobber was that he had access to an enormous workforce without having to tramp across the city or deep into the countryside.

Through 1565, a consistent group of three lanini, working for a range of merchants, passed on carded wool to the girls of the Pietà month after month. Benedetto di Filippo, Lorenzo di Bardo, and Francesco "il Naso" ("Franky the Nose") were the most regular, while a fourth, Pagolo, brought work intermittently. By contrast, only one staimaiuolo, Andrea Parenti, also representing a number of merchants, brought his combed wool for the Pietà girls to work on, but he used it intensively and he paid better. Through our sample year of 1565, the four lanini brought in almost 2,500 pounds of carded wool and paid more than 1,500 lire, while the staimauolo Andrea Parenti brought over 175 pounds and paid just more than 265 lire.[22] We can't be sure how the work filled the girls' days, since the ledger shows only when an account was paid and not when the work was done: Parenti usually settled every couple of months, paying for roughly 30 pounds each time. Although we can't be sure when the work would have been done; even averaged out it wouldn't have occupied much time for too many girls. The lanini were a bit more regular, with small peaks in March and September that are more likely to represent payment patterns than work patterns. Here too, 200 pounds of work monthly should not have sapped the energies of well over a hundred girls.

This isn't to say that the work wasn't extremely valuable for the wool industry and the Pietà alike. The warp and weft threads coming out of the Pietà went on to be woven into rash, a fine woolen cloth used largely for men's clothing. It was the most expensive wool produced in Florence at the time, and while the busy spinning by the Pietà girls was not going to revolutionize the industry, it did make a difference. In the central decades of the sixteenth century, the wool industry was expanding, prosperous, and confident. No one anticipated the sudden collapse that would cut production by half in only a few decades, or the long, slow decline that would follow. Few account books of contemporary wool merchants survive, though one belonging to Francesco de' Medici shows that in 1556–58 spinning raw wool into thread represented more than 20 percent of his costs. Nothing else came close—even weaving, which was the next highest production cost, represented only 12 percent of the cost of producing a bolt of cloth.[23] This meant that the Pietà girls, located in the heart of a district crammed with wool shops, were a valuable resource for a booming industry to have close at hand. While customs, laws, and prejudices kept women at the bottom of the process, they earned some serious money—more than 1,700 lire in 1565, or about the same as the earnings of eight or nine weavers working full time in a year.[24]

Girls in Silk—Charity as an Industrial Strategy

Wool was not the only thing that girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena spun in the old Umiltà hospital. Silk was Florence's textile growth industry, and the Pietà girls had a toehold in it. Here, too, their main work was preparing the threads for weaving. Yet silk couldn't have been more different than wool, either in the space it took, the income it produced, or its effect on the girls.

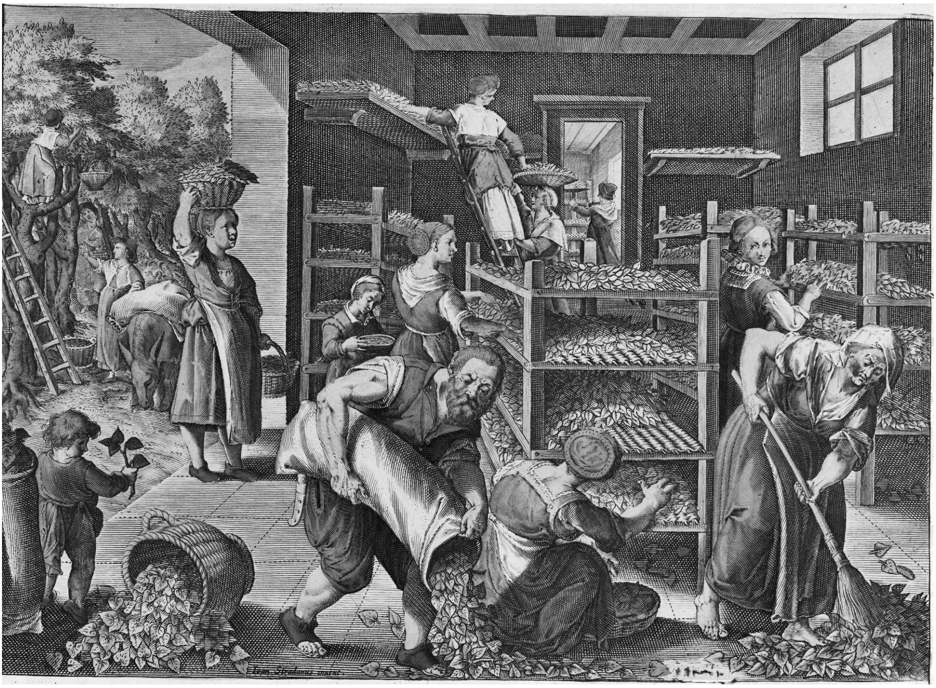
Silk was transforming the Italian economy. An eccentric Bolognese polymath Leonardo Fioravanti set out its few complex and labor-intensive operations:

> The silk craft is a very noble art . . . it is a craft that exalts the rich and helps the poor; and great skills are needed to ply it, since it involves an infinitude of operations; no one is to be found who is capable of doing on his own the many tasks that it involves. The first of which is to hatch the worms that make the silk, and nourish them. . . . Afterwards there are masters and mistresses who, when the cocoons are ready, dry them under the sun for one or two days; and they put a cauldron over a fire and bring it to the boiling point, putting the cocoons inside; and with certain spindles they reel the silk, which when completed goes into the hands of the mistresses, who wind it on the reels; and then it goes back to the Spinner, who spins it, and once it is spun it comes back into the hands of the mistresses, who wind it again on the reels and bring it back to the Spinner for throwing; and when the silk is thrown, and after the merchant has checked it, it goes to the Dyer; and the Dyer first boils it in water and soap and then dyes it any color one wishes; and it returns to the Merchant, who puts it on wooden

> pegs with which he spread it out very carefully and makes it lustrous and beautiful; then it goes to the mistresses, who wind it on certain spools, with which the Weaver prepares the warp he desires and weaves it as he pleases into velvets, satins, damasks, tabies, *ormesini*, and so on; and thus the craft is finished, to the glory of God and to the benefit of the world.[25]

It's hard to tell where in all this the Pietà girls' work began, though at some point, they did everything that Fioravanti ascribes to the "mistresses." Did the girls raise the worms and tend to the cocoons at Borgo Ognissanti?[26] These operations often took place at the same place where cocoons were unwound, though it's hard to see how this could have been done in their cramped quarters in the Umiltà hospital. Florentine silk merchants of the fifteenth century had bought skeins of raw silk that was raised and unwound in far-off places: around the Caspian Sea, in Spain, on Greek islands, and in Sicily and Calabria. But as the Medici dukes pushed to expand Tuscan production through the sixteenth century, more of this low-paid and labor-intensive work was done locally.[27] Some of it was taking place at the Pietà.

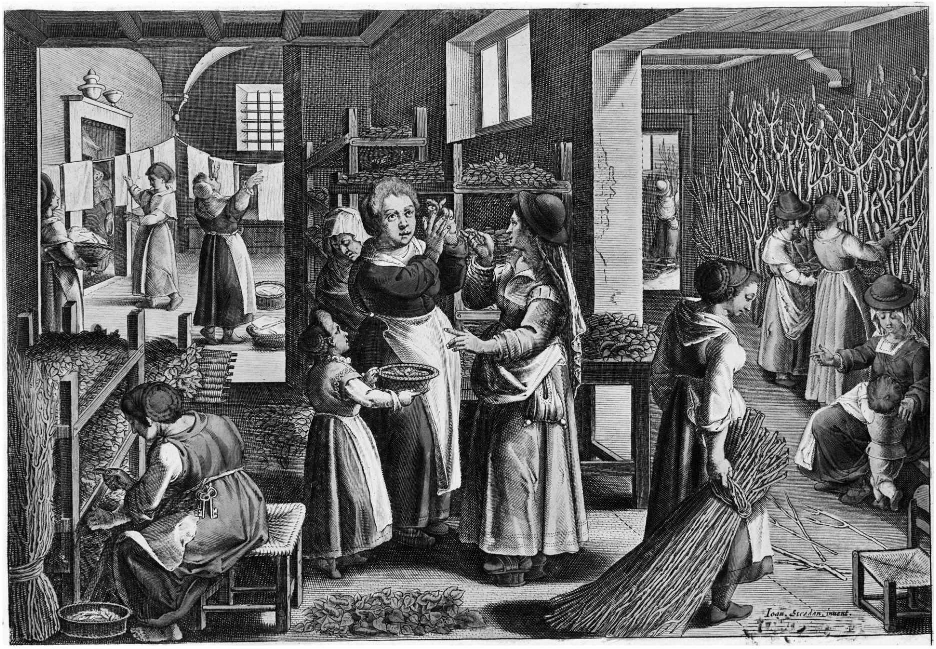
The work's first stages were concentrated into just two months in spring, as Sir Robert Dallington saw when he surveyed Tuscany. Around the time Dallington was making his observations, Flemish engraver Jan van der Straet produced a series of images of Florentine girls and women raising silkworms and unwinding cocoons, which could have been a picture of the work inside the Pietà. In one image, more than a dozen children, teenagers, and older women are at work, spreading the microscopic eggs on large trays that are stacked on open shelves and filled daily with ever larger amounts of fresh—no more than slightly wilted—mulberry leaves over the six weeks that the worms feed. The worms grew at a predictable rate, so timing their hatching was critical. Dallington noted that Tuscan producers relied mainly on the sun to warm the eggs but that they also used girls' own body heat. Even if Margherita, Maria, or Maddalena didn't carry eggs in their bosoms, the whole operation wove itself deeply into their daily lives. Finding space among the wide beds of the stacked shelves of cocoons and the bales of mulberry leaves that came in daily from the trees that the duke was planting in every spare ditch in Tuscany was a constant challenge. Then there was something that the



Picking Mulberry Leaves and Feeding Silkworms. Jan van der Straet, *Vermis sericus*. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

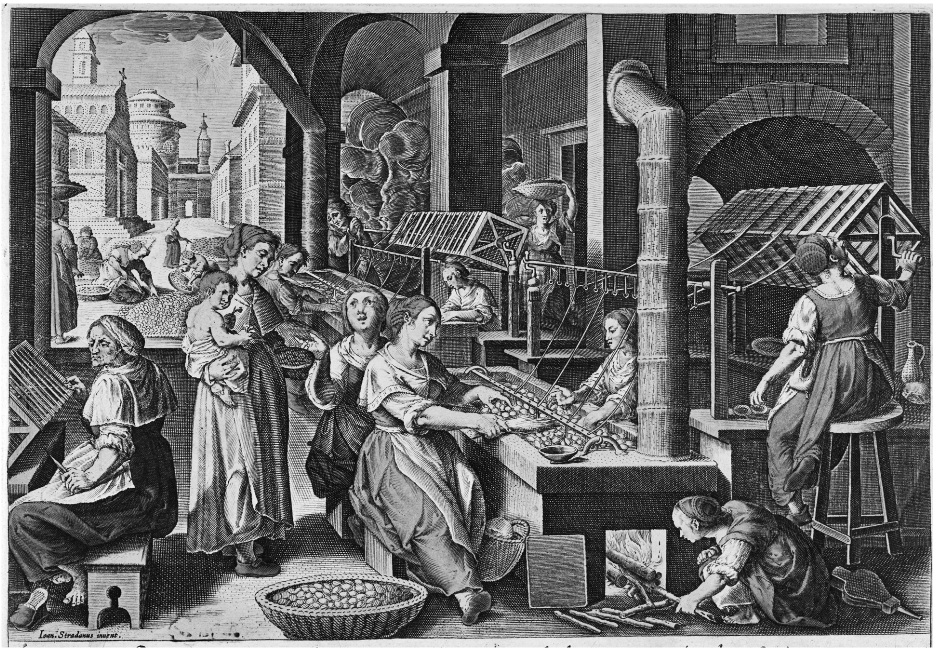
enthusiastic Fioravanti had neglected to mention: the roaring chorus of many thousands of ravenous worms eating day and night through literally tons of leaves. After six weeks of ever-increasing din, the worms turned suddenly silent as they began spinning their cocoons. They crawled up into stripped twigs and branches that the girls positioned on their trays and then beginning the lazy-eight twisting of their heads that would, over the course of three days, produce the white ovoid form. In a little more than a week, the *conduttora* tending the cocoons had to determine which were to be saved for eggs, which discolored, damaged, or doubled cocoons were to be discarded, and which to be unreeled for thread. The latter had to be treated, with dry heat or a warm bath, to kill the larvae before they had a chance to break out and destroy the cocoon.

It's most likely that through the years when the Pietà girls occupied the three homes in Borgo Ognissanti, they first encountered the cocoons at the next stage of reeling (*incannare* or *trarre*). Beyond any raised in the


Ioan. Stradan. inuent.

Raising Silkworms. Jan van der Straet, *Vermis sericus*. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Umiltà hospital, cocoons came in their thousands, carried in big wooden chests from the Tuscan countryside, from wholesalers in Sicily or Calabria, or from Bologna's famous annual market, the Pavaglione. Once they arrived the girls' work intensified. It was delicate, time consuming, low paid, and, for all these reasons, reserved largely for young girls, who—locked up in conservatories, foundling homes, workhouses, or convents—had no choice of occupation.[28] In van der Straet's engravings, the girls use bundled twigs to stir the cocoons and soften their hard outer shells in basins of hot water mixed with a little alkali. They found the end of the filament for two, four, or five cocoons and lined these up to create a single thread, which they then combined and attached to a long and open rectangular reel made up of four parallel bars and located either over their shoulders or just in front of the large, warm bath holding the cocoons. Individual filaments were barely visible, and even four or six together were smaller than a human hair. The turning spool unreeled the cocoons, and the girl had to keep a sharp eye for lumps, thick pieces, or breaks in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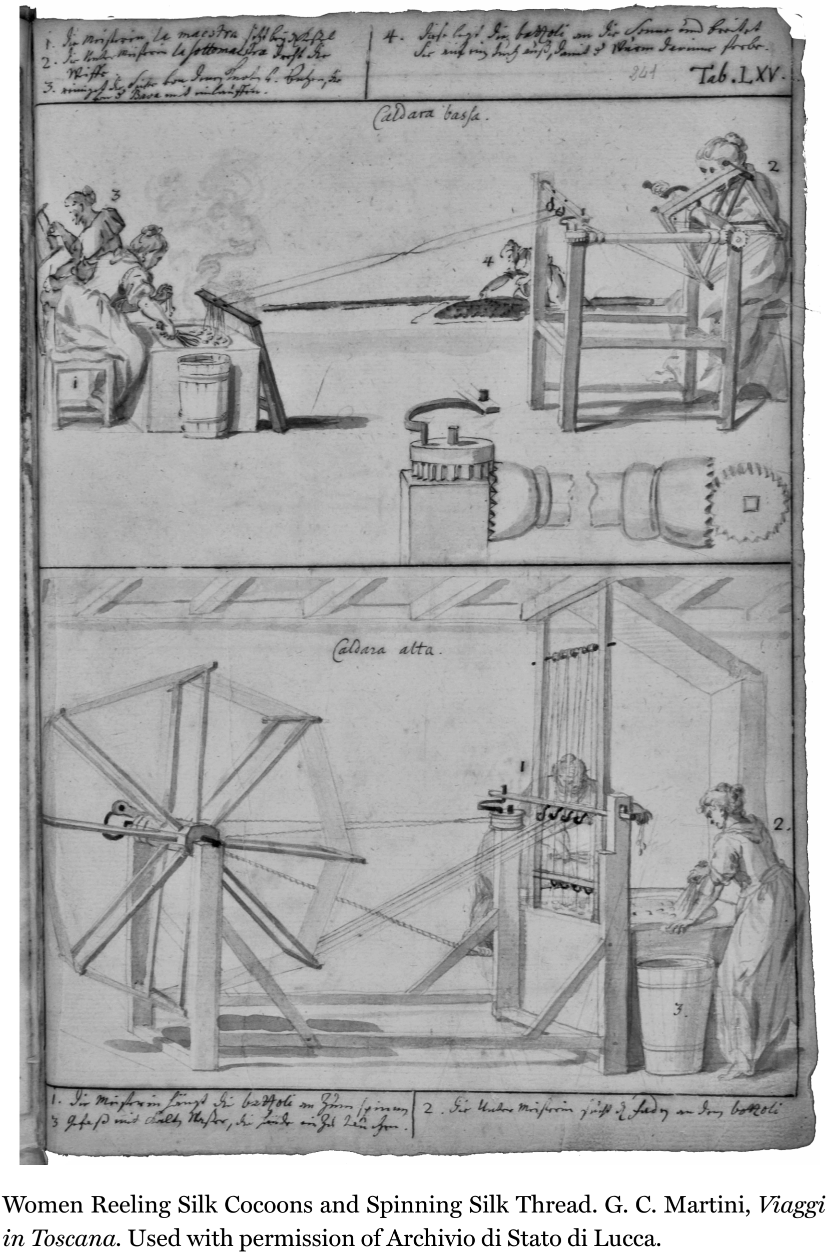
Reeling Silk Cocoons in an Institution. Jan van der Straet, *Vermis sericus*. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

individual filaments and keep a fresh filament at hand to splice in if necessary. Cocoons that were doubled, pierced, or otherwise damaged required more careful spinning to produce the thread. A young girl could spin wool by feel, free then to talk, sing, read, or daydream. Silk took all her attention.

The work seems slow and languid, an impression reinforced by van der Straet's engravings of unhurried women working in large, open workshops. Some numbers may help to clarify the staggering scale of silk and push this bucolic image aside. A single white cocoon, usually about one inch wide and one and a half inches long, was made up of a single filament that was from 500 to 1,000 meters or more long. Writing in the early nineteenth century, the French economist and historian Jean Simonde de Sismondi (1773–1842), who was familiar with Tuscan sericulture, estimated that it took 10 pounds (*libbre*) of dried cocoons to produce 1 pound of reeled silk, and 7.69 pounds of the doubled, pierced, or damaged cocoons to produce 1 pound of spun silk. Individual cocoons were light, weighing from 1.5 to 2.5 grams, which meant that it could take from two hundred to three hundred cocoons to make up a pound. It would have taken thirty thousand worms to produce 12 pounds of finished silk thread, and these worms would have eaten one ton of the duke's mulberry leaves in the process. In 1565, the girls of the Pietà processed one hundred times that much—almost 1,200 pounds of silk—drawn from literally millions of cocoons and requiring many tons of leaves. Even if we cannot know how much of this work took place within the walls of shelter on Borgo Ognissanti, the sheer scale is staggering, and the work would have been extraordinarily intense.[29]

Preparing silk thread began with reeling but could extend much further. The reeled filaments were still far too fragile to be woven without breaking, so the girls twisted the strands to create a usable silk thread—this was the process Fioravanti called "throwing" (*torciture*) and which was also sometimes called "doubling" (*addoppiare*). All strands were twisted to the right—at least once, but with as many as forty to forty-five twists per inch—and some of this thread was then doubled and twisted again to the left. When it came to weaving, these thicker strands would be used as the warp threads stretched lengthwise on the looms into which the thinner weft strands were woven. In cities such as Bologna and Vicenza, towering water-powered wheels that filled three-story buildings and were outfitted with dozens and even hundreds of spools took over this process. Since the Arno did not flow as regularly, Florentine throwers used a far smaller manually powered machine, and the Pietà was outfitted with at least one of these.[30] Relying on handlooms made Florentine thread more costly to produce and forced silk merchants to find other ways of reducing their labor costs.

Once the thread had been doubled, it had to be "cooked"—put into large sacks and immersed for a short period in large vats boiling with a light soap-and-water solution that released some of the natural gum and prepared the thread for dying. Like the oils in wool, the gum in silk gave it resilience through the strains of spinning but had to be removed after that so that the dye could set. Gum gave raw silk thread a gray color—giving the newly reeled skeins their name "gray silk"—and it also gave weight. Skeins could lose as much as a quarter of their weight by cooking, and since the girls were paid by the pounds and ounces of silk they produced, they had to do this cooking carefully.[31] Every ounce of gum

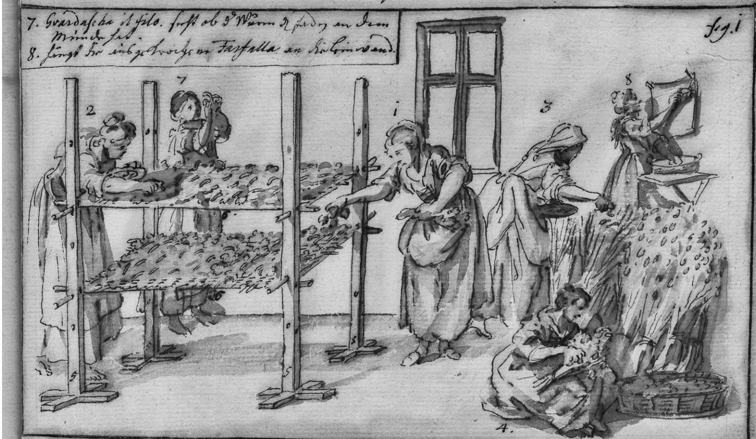

1. Die Meisterin la maestra sitzt bey Kessel
2. Die Unter Meisterin la sottomaestra
3.
4. Diese legt die battoli an die Sonne und breitet
Tab. LXV.
241
Caldara bassa.
1
2
3
4
Caldara alta.
1
2.
3.
1. Die Meisterin bringt die battoli
2. Die Unter Meisterin giesst die faden an den battoli

Women Reeling Silk Cocoons and Spinning Silk Thread. G. C. Martini, *Viaggio in Toscana*. Used with permission of Archivio di Stato di Lucca.

Guverno de Faruscelli. Wartung derer Seiden würme.

Tab LXIII.

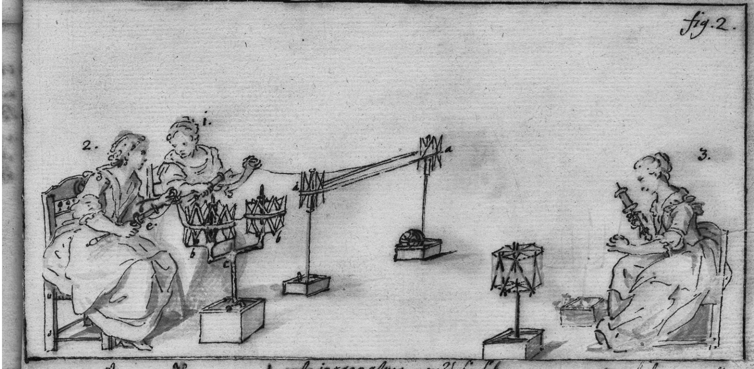
339

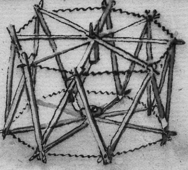


7. Guardascha il filo. sieht ob d. Würm d. faden an dem Munde hat.
8. hängt die ausgekrochene Farfalla an die Leinwand.

1. legt frisches maulbeer laub auf die Seiden würme.
2. liest die reiffen Seiden würme aus und legt sie auf einen teller.
3. legt die aufgelesenen reiffe Seide würme auf die Büsche [illegible].
4. nimmt sie von denen Büschen ab.

5. Castello, Gestelle, bestehend aus 4. Säulen mit Kreutz füßen, und Löchern versehen in welche man runde Hölzer steckt, die Canicci od. aus geflochtene Rohr decken darauf zu legen.
6. Rohr decken auf welchen die Seiden würme aufgezogen werden.





1. diese incannatura, wozu sie sich gewisser [illegible] od. Favellen bedient aa. welche sie nach d. länge der Haspeln von einander aufspannen bb.
2. diese hat zwey Haspeln welche auf den filatoro nach d. ersten incannatura gesponnen worden sind, setzt sie auf ein Gestell c. und nimmt von beyden zusammen ein faden und windet sie auf d. Spule e. diese kommt zum 2t. mal auf den filatoio und gedreht od. gezwirnt.

3. diese windet die Seide ab auf cannelli, welche auf dem filatoio gesponnen worden sind und zur trama dienet.

2. legt die Zeuge in falten, die onda oder das Wasser zu geben. | 4. [illegible] | 10. zeiget was in der Mangel von Kaufleuten geschickt wird.

boiled off cost them money. Once twisted, doubled, and cooked, the skeins of silk, now soft and white, headed out the door and on to a dyer's workshop.

Most of the Pietà's silk work in 1565 passed through the jobber (or *sensale*) Francesco di Iacopo Barberino, who drew from two silk merchants: Giovanni Soldani and Baccio Comi.[32] Over half of Comi's silk came from Calabria and Sicily, and so likely arrived at the Pietà in skeins already reeled and ready for spinning, twisting, and washing. By contrast, most of Soldani's came from Tuscany or Emilia Romagna, and so more likely entered as cocoons that still needed reeling.[33] Barberino is not the only person to turn up in the accounts. Others with connections to the Pietà served as intermediaries and agents who found work for the girls and collected the money owed them. The old bookkeeper Paolo di Giorgio Ughi is there, as are members of the Compagnia della Pietà, such as Mona Ginevra di Tolomei. For that matter, the wives of Comi and Soldani were also members of the Compagnia della Pietà and may have had a hand in ensuring that their husbands' piecework ended up in the hands of the Pietà girls.

While the girls' wool work took up little space and could be done in almost any corner under any conditions, their silk work required lots of space, light, and time. Girls working the bulky reels needed sunlight to trace the fine filaments, tables for the bowls of hot water that held the cocoons, space for the larger spinning wheels used to double and twist the warp threads, and vats over fires to cook the spun threads. But for all this investment of time, space, and labor, silk generated far less income per pound than wool. It took more girls working harder and longer to produce a pound of silk as compared with a pound of wool, but they were paid less for it—about lire 1.6 soldi for a pound of reeled and twisted silk thread, as against 1.15 for wool. The exact figures are hard to determine because in the silk industry, unlike wool, wages for spinning were not fixed by law or by the new statutes that it adopted in these years.[34] Yet Florence's wool industry was about to enter into its decline, while silk was still on the rise, and within a few years, the Pietà was netting more from its work with the gossamer filaments. For better or worse, the Pietà's future lay in silk, and this would change the girls' lives.[35]

Silk was an industry built on the labor of women and children.[36] Across Europe, silk employed many more women than men, in numbers reaching to the thousands in cities the size of Florence, Venice, or Bologna, where at least a quarter of the population had worked in the silk industry at some point in the year. Many worked in institutions that they couldn't easily get out of, like convents, orphanages, or workhouses, making silk work a form of forced labor. Did it pay? While more than 60 percent of the cost of a bolt of woolen cloth could be traced to the costs of production—everything from machines and tools to labor—for silk, it was only half that. Silk's highest-paid workers, the weavers, commanded salaries at the top of the artisanal scale. Its lowest-paid workers, the girls who spun thread and the boys who set the looms as apprentices, earned far less than their counterparts in other industries. We saw that in the wool industry, the girls' spinning represented 16 percent to 20 percent of the final cost of the cloth. In the silk industry, which had only a fraction of the number of steps, and far fewer workers to be paid as the bolt of cloth took shape, that same work represented less than 0.5 percent of the final price. In fact, the girls' reeling, throwing, and spinning all taken together usually totaled only 1.5 percent of the cost of a bolt of silk cloth. Merchants spent more than that just for the soap they used to wash the gray silk skeins.[37]

The weavers often complained about unreliable and absent apprentices who took time off regularly and broke their contracts, but it's hard to feel much sympathy for them. After twelve years as an apprentice and journeyman, a silk worker would still be earning no more than an unskilled laborer on a Florentine building site. Apart from the weavers, the silk merchants benefited the most from this skewed system. Through civic laws and their own guild of Por San Maria, they had structured the industry in such a way that only they could commission work, own the raw materials, or sell finished goods to buyers. As a result, silk manufacturing did not spread wealth through the city the way wool did, though it could make a small number of people very rich.

The silk merchants' appetite for low-cost labor was as ravenous as the silkworms' appetite for mulberry leaves. Women and children began taking on jobs once done by men, and that work began moving from cities out into the countryside.[38] This was especially the case as Tuscan sericulture expanded, and Florentine silk merchants like Baccio Comi and Giovanni Soldani could use local produce in place of imported thread and gray silk. When Robert Dallington toured Tuscany, only 12 percent of the silk worked in Florence came from Tuscan raw materials. Five decades later, the figure had shot up to 75 percent, a result of the dukes' planting mulberry trees all over Tuscany. This meant that more of the work and the profits stayed in Tuscany. What grew most dramatically was the lower-end work available for women and children tending trees, reeling cocoons, and spinning thread—there were easily six times as many of these jobs by 1650, even though the number of cloths produced by Florentine merchants had not changed.[39] By that later date, more than fourteen thousand Florentines out of a population of about seventy thousand participated in creating silk. However staggering this percentage may seem, it was below that found in the truly industrial centers such as Venice and Bologna.

Yet these often-cited figures are misleading. Silk work was intensive, carried out in strictly limited period of a few weeks or months. Eight thousand Florentines reeled the cocoons, but it was essentially a summer job. Of the rest, less than three thousand could work year-round in the top end jobs of weaving and dying. Two other figures from 1650 are telling: almost twelve thousand of the fourteen thousand working in silk were women, and more than six thousand were children.[40] Some work took place in farms and villages dotted around the countryside, but it still was not enough. Silk merchants needed thousands of people to be on call and ready to work for intensive but relatively short periods of time in the spring and summer—and for very little money.

As a result, it is no surprise to find that across Europe, silk merchants organized and often administered the large enclosed institutions for foundlings, for abandoned children, for poor widows, and for battered wives—in short, for anyone whose help was to come behind a closed and locked door and in company with dozens or even hundreds of others. Institutions like this were expensive to run, and the people sheltering in them worked intensely to earn the money that kept them going. It's no coincidence that Italy's silk merchants started founding more of these enclosed charitable institutions at the time that they began sourcing more of their raw silk in Italy. The reeling once done in far-off places such as the Caspian Sea now had to be done in places such as Tuscany. Florence's silk merchants ran its pioneering foundling hospital, the Ospedale degli Innocenti, and the Innocenti's foundlings reeled most of the silk for those same merchants until new homes like S. Niccolò and the Pietà emerged in the 1550s.[41] Bologna's magistracy of the Pavaglione in charge of the silk fair where cocoons were bought and sold was also the magistracy in charge of that city's pioneering workhouse, the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, where those same cocoons were unreeled and spun by hundreds of captive women and children for pennies. Pennies that they never actually saw, unless you count the *ribollita*-style bread and vegetable soups they ate at lunch and the four-person beds they shared at night. We already saw that the Pietà was no exception: some of the members of its supporting Compagnia della Pietà sent over raw silk for spinning or thread for weaving or were married to the silk merchants and jobbers who handled the Pietà's silk piecework.[42]

Was this charity or exploitation? Fioravanti had opined that "silk is a very noble art, worthy of being plied by any true gentleman . . . [enjoying] many exemptions and very great privileges . . . because it is a craft that exalts the rich and helps the poor."[43] Silk merchants certainly squeezed privileges and exemptions out of governments and won praise for their charitable works. But even their charity was good business, and in the end, we have to recognize that the shelters and institutions that silk merchants so generously launched and supervised were convenient solutions to their own labor problems.[44] As such, the merchants turned girls such as Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena, and above all their home the Pietà into an important part of the Florentine silk economy.

One distinct advantage for the silk merchants of having a large and captive labor force was that they were less subject to the industry's seasonal rhythms. What we could call the "silk season" began in earnest with the tending of eggs, worms, and cocoons in May and June. Certainly, some of the biggest payments from merchants to the Pietà came in late June and August, an indication that the girls were involved in these early stages of production. But the merchants fed work into the home all year long, and girls were still spinning and throwing a previous year's production in April, just as the home was gearing up for start of the new season. What's perhaps even more incredible is that even as Mona Alessandra busied around the home, arranging every free space she could for silk reeling, a few of the girls carried on spinning wool. On the whole, both wool and silk work tended to come into the home in commissions spaced regularly through the year, though wool merchants paid smaller sums at more regular intervals, while silk merchants paid larger sums a few times a year.[45]

Girls like Maria, Maddalena, and Margherita worked constantly, but not only for others. By hiring Mona Betta, Caterina, Brigida, and the other weavers, Mona Alessandra and the Pietà's sponsors clearly aimed to move the girls beyond reeling and spinning thread for wool and silk merchants and into weaving cloth for their own profit. The girls produced the simpler and cheaper cloths in linen and wool that could be sewn into handkerchiefs, bandages, swaddling cloths, and simple shirts. Judging by the quantity they produced, the girls likely had three or four looms in operation.[46] Yet the amounts they earned were pretty modest when compared with their spinning and reeling—usually no more than 2 soldi per *braccio*, the arm's-length measure that Florentines used for cloth.[47] But it was a toehold in another world. While the bulk of the Pietà's earnings came from a handful of large-scale capitalists who were pushing to concentrate the production of thread, weaving connected the girls to the world of cottage industries spread all around the city and paying only pennies. More than that, while spinning tied girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena to a small circle of male textile merchants working through jobbers, weaving brought them into contact with a host of women who sewed simple items in their homes. It was the Pietà's own status as a factory in all but name that allowed it to bridge those two worlds. The woven cloths went out in small lots of 20 to 60 braccia to women such as Mona de Pechori or Mona Margherita de Teri or Mona Fiametta, who actually sewed handkerchiefs and shirts from the girls' lengths of cloth. Only one woman, Mona Nannina, seemed to operate on a larger scale as *rivenditora*, a wholesaler who likely distributed the cloths on to the dozens of women spread throughout the city who sewed small items for sale in whatever time they could spare.

The Pietà girls also began weaving simple silk cloths and ribbons, though on a smaller scale.[48] The same silk merchants and guild regulations that kept women and children at the bottom of the manufacturing process permitted them to weave nothing more than the cheapest fabrics that male weavers found a waste of time—taffetas and satins rather than velvets and brocades. Women often stuck to producing narrow ribbons woven on small looms rather than the wider cloths, which required larger machines. At the same time, on a piece-by-piece basis, a woman weaving silk cloths earned triple or more what she earned from weaving woolen cloths. Weaving was the only part of silk work that was more lucrative for workers than wool. A woman who kept a loom at home so she could weave in the few hours she could find while keeping house, might produce a 50 braccia length of taffeta in about eight weeks, and she would earn 12 to 15 lire, enough for a barrel of wine and five bushels of grain. The same length of satin might take half again as long or even double the time to produce and would earn about 20 lire.[49] Pietà girls such as Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena would be able to produce the thin taffetas and shiny satins in a far shorter time, since they could devote more hours to the work.

Given the opportunity to weave more silk cloths, the girls might have earned significantly more income. Yet they did little silk weaving at Borgo Ognissanti perhaps because of a lack of training or lack of space for the looms. There may also have been some tacit understanding in place that kept the Pietà girls, drawn from the bottom of the social ladder, at the bottom of the piecework pay scale. Girls in upscale conservatories elsewhere wove lace, embroidered fabrics, and worked in gold thread. In Florence, nuns did most of this kind of work, which took more training and produced more income. The Pietà girls would eventually move into these more productive forms of piecework, but only after they had left Borgo Ognissanti.

Work kept the girls alive. Did it also kill them? The detailed accounts for the one-year window of 1565 show that it was intense—well over a ton of wool, hundreds of thousands and possibly even a few million cocoons, and over a kilometer of woven cloth—but could this amount of work actually be fatal? One historian of silk work claims that reeling and spinning would wear a girl out in six or seven years, and many of the girls who died in the home didn't even last that long. Another historian paints an even grimmer picture,

> The conditions of work were among the worst anywhere . . . Tuberculosis was rife in the workshops and mortality rates high. Death was perhaps the commonest cause of worker replacement. The silk industry simply ate up human labour and one position could be filled in two or three years by three or four girls, often related, who simply

> stepped in when the predecessor died. . . . Some survived deprivation and the burning up of their physical strength to emerge with dowries healthy enough to purchase [a] mastership for the apprentice they chose as a husband.[50]

Pietà girls worked this hard in 1565, but perhaps that was an exceptional year. We need to look beyond our one-year window to get a better idea of how hard they worked thoughout the years at Ognissanti, and one ledger in the Pietà archive promises to give us a wider view.

Unlike Abbess Maria Teresa Petrucci's neatly copied *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*, the volume of accounts for *Cloth Manufacturing and Pledges, 1554–79* is more like the leather-bound daybook of 1565–66 we have just been using, since it was in the hands of the people running the Pietà in its earliest years.[51] With many different inks, hands, and items recorded, it seems that Marietta Gondi, Mona Alessandra, and Giovanni Bencini all put their pens to its pages at one point or another. The archive inventory claims that this ledger records the value of the cloths that the girls had worked on and the rents that the home had earned over its first twenty-five years. This would let us see how the Pietà's textile work first emerged, and what its expanding importance on the balance sheet meant in concrete terms of pounds of wool and silk produced. We might also come to see how the girls balanced their work between the profitable wool trade, and the less profitable, more intensive, and frankly grueling silk spinning that they did. If the balance began tipping to silk, we could easily imagine that conditions at the Pietà would be getting worse. The manuscript promises a great deal, but in the end, it doesn't deliver—or at least it doesn't deliver what it promises, much like *The Chronicles*.

It turns out to be a register about the size of a trade paperback, and it has taken a beating. The calves' skin cover is stained and damaged from being laid down here and there and shoved into belts or pockets. The spine is bent over into a permanent curve from being cracked open so often to cram in yet another set of entries. It opens to a scrawling set of entries from the early 1570s that move in, around, and sometimes right over an earlier set of records from the mid-1550s: this was what it looked like when bookkeeper Giovanni Bencini raced to keep up with his accounts. He was recording daily expenses, chiefly food. The hasty descriptions and prices scrawl down pages that still bear the neat and deliberate entries of years before. Maybe Bencini kept this ledger tucked in his pocket and slapped it on to the nearest flat surface for writing when the butcher came with some mutton or the baker with a load of bread.

The entries from the 1550s aren't textile accounts but lists of the sponsors who had pledged to support the Pietà with annual donations, together with a record of what these sponsors actually paid. Carefully written in a firm and dark hand, these entries could have been penned by Marietta Gondi in her role as head of the Compagnia della Pietà that oversaw administration and funded the Pietà. But neither Bencini nor Gondi records anything about textiles. Paging back and forth through the ledger, it seems that textiles are actually among the few things *not* recorded. What does appear, hidden away in the middle of the volume after a few blank pages, is the heading "*Del Ricettario*," followed by a few pages of what look to be recipes. The heading could be translated as either "Of the Recipe book" or "On the Prescription Pad," though these pages don't give *ribollita*-style soups or stews but medicines. The archive inventory says nothing about these medical recipes, and there's no indication on the ledger's spine, cover, or opening pages that they are there. Many institutions kept collections like this, though these are hidden away. After the last of the recipes, the energetic scrawls picks up again—curiously, Bencini had avoided writing over these pages of the "prescription pad."

There aren't too many recipes: only fifteen spread over seven pages. They appear to have been compiled over a period of time and, judging by the handwriting, by at least three different people. These aren't the hands that fill the ledger's other pages. One is reasonably fluid, while the others have a blocky, almost childlike look of someone who knows how to write but doesn't do it very often.[52] These may have been written by Mona Alessandra, the resident prioress, or by the *medica* Margherita who nursed the girls when they were injured or sick. Only one recipe is dated: 1567. Some are simple compounds of three or four ingredients, while the longest has twelve. They all have instructions for how to mix ingredients and cook up the medication, but in most cases, they say nothing about what ailments they are meant to relieve or heal, not unlike a prescription pad. The *Ricettario* is another puzzle in a series of Pietà puzzles, but it may hold a key to the mystery of why girls were dying. Perhaps they deal with workplace injuries, which would explain what they are doing in this volume on *Cloth Manufacturing and Pledges*. It may also then give us an idea of what made conditions in the Pietà so unhealthy and even fatal for the teenage girls crowded in there.

The recipes seem straightforward enough: a collection of ointments, salves, and plasters that a medic could spread externally, together with a couple of syrups that a girl might drink in small doses. The fifty-four ingredients run the range of herbal medicine, combining ingredients that seem inert, such as "old oil" and flour, with others that have more active properties, such as turpentine and Greek pitch. Some of the recipes seem to be treatments for the kind of illnesses that we could expect in a tightly packed institution where the girls shared beds, ate little, and worked hard, though there is only one that we can specifically trace to this.

As they shared the overcrowded beds, the girls could end up sharing skin diseases as well. The *Ricettario* singles out *tigna*, or ringworm, a highly contagious fungus that developed as large, ring-shaped scaly patches on the scalps of children. Ringworm spread rapidly across the scalp and rapidly through homes and orphanages where children lived jammed together. Even if it wasn't ultimately harmful, the hair loss and scales made it an ugly condition that was hard to cure. It hit young children most intensely and adolescents hardly at all. Faced with an outbreak, the Pietà medica had to remove all the hair from the infected parts of a girl's scalp before spreading on an ointment that mixed active ingredients altea and aquilon into a base made up of equal parts pork fat and pine resin. According to an anonymous fifteenth-century herbalist, altea had soothing qualities much like mallow. It rapidly reduced swelling and inflammations and helped regenerate skin. The aquilon was a prepared compound, and a smaller amount of it intensified the ringworm treatment by adding linseed oil to suppress inflammation and lead oxide to ease aches and pains. The *Ricettario* did not say how long the girl should have this ointment on her shaved head but did warn that it should not be washed out with soap, which would be too harsh. The nurse should instead bathe her head with a solution of mallow, ash, plantain (good for purifying and closing wounds, among other things), and some barley water if it was available, as that would help soften, soothe, and smooth the skin.[53]

What of injuries that a girl might get directly because of the textile piecework that filled the Pietà's cramped spaces and time? The over-worked girls of the Pietà could easily develop respiratory problems from spending hours bent over bowls of warm water reeling cocoons in rooms that were sometimes hot and sometimes cold but always damp. For this, the medica might cook up one of a couple of chest plasters that combined the flours of a few dried and ground-up grains and legumes like broad beans, pulse, chickpeas (thought to be rich in iron and other minerals), barley (thought to increase energy), and gruel. These were cooked for a long time over a slow fire with a compound known as *oximele semplice*, a blend of honey and vinegar that doctors from the time of Hippocrates had prescribed for coughs.[54] As they handled the large brass pots in which silk was cooked, some girls would inevitably get burns, and at least one ointment was good for this. Eyes that were trained on filaments hour after hour and day after day strained in the effort, and we find an ointment for soothing sore eyes that the *Ricettario* describes as "*magistrale*," or excellent. The medica combined some dried fatty meat together with malmsey wine, which hospitals commonly dispensed to relieve suffering. These she cooked together until the wine had boiled off, leaving behind a thick paste. To this she added some white wax, the basic binding agent for unguents, and a quantity of *tutia*, a by-product of brass refining that was ground into a powder and valued for its medicinal properties, particularly against bruises.[55]

Overcrowding or overwork sent some girls to the infirmary. Others might have the symptoms of a puzzling illness doctors were just coming to recognize as a deadly disease that affected girls as they reached puberty. Headaches and a racing heart, mood swings from lethargy to depression to anxiety, loss of appetite, triggering anemia and amenorrhea: the more symptoms a girl displayed, the clearer it was that she was suffering from what some authorities called *morbus virgineus* (the disease of virgins), and what came to be known popularly in England as "greensickness." Awareness of this disease was just spreading, helped by printers eager to cash in on a growing demand for medical texts. A Venetian press in 1547 put out the definitive Italian edition of gynecological texts attributed to Trotula of Salerno, widely thought to have been a woman who taught medicine in the eleventh century. A host of authors rushed other popular works on "women's secrets" into press in the decades following, spreading knowledge of the symptoms of the "disease of virgins" and the cause—inevitably some suffocation or strangulation of the womb. One cure became even more famous: the quickest relief for a girl suffering greensickness was sex. More conventional cures included bleeding, shutting girls up in dark rooms on a diet of bread and water, or "a good beating." Herbal ointments, salves, and plasters like those in the *Ricettario* might also help. Doctors feared that the disease of virgins could be fatal if left untreated, but it's unlikely that many of the girls in the Pietà would have suffered from it. As the decades passed, doctors also noted only upper-class girls seemed to suffer from it, while poor or working girls were immune. Greensickness was a medicalizing of patrician puberty.[56]

Trotula and the anonymous Renaissance herbalist help us to understand what healers, nurses, and patients expected the ingredients of the *Ricettario* to do. Since Renaissance doctors drew so heavily on classical sources, it's at least as important to determine whether the doctors of ancient Greece and Rome had any opinions on them. Likely sources include Dioscorides, author of a standard pharmacopoeia, and Soranus, the second-century doctor whose *On Gynecology* was the first and virtually only guide to women's health, known to many through the work of translators and abbreviators.[57]

Yet this closer look brings out a curious side to the recipes. A number of them are compounds of many ingredients that Dioscorides, Soranus, Trotula, and the anonymous Renaissance herbal described as abortifacients—that is, items so toxic that they could trigger a miscarriage.[58] In fact, nine of the fifty-four ingredients in the recipes had this effect. The question we have been pursuing—what was killing the girls of the Pietà—suddenly takes on an unexpected and barely credible dimension. Was the Pietà and its supervising confraternity the Company of Compassion helping girls terminate pregnancies?

CHAPTER FOUR

Teenage Girls and Birth Control

LIGURIO: We need your help with a strange problem of Messer Nicia's concerning the honor of his house that only you can help with.

FRA TIMOTEO: What is it?

LIGURIO: I don't know if you know Camillo Calfucci, Messer Nicia's nephew?

FRA TIMOTEO: Yes, I know him.

LIGURIO: A year ago he went to France on business, and because his wife had died, he left his daughter of marriageable age in a convent which I'll leave unnamed for the moment.

FRA TIMOTEO: What happened?

LIGURIO: It happened that, from either the carelessness of the nuns or the foolishness of the girl, she's now four months pregnant, which means that if the damage isn't put right prudently, Messer Nicia, the nuns, the girl, Camillo, and the Calfucci family will all suffer dishonor. Messer Nicia is so concerned about this dishonor that if it can be avoided he has pledged to give 300 ducats for the love of God ----

MESSER NICIA: What crap!

LIGURIO: [*Aside to* Nicia] Shut up! [*To* Friar Timeo] --- and donate them you for distribution as only you and the abbess of the nunnery can solve this problem.

FRA TIMOTEO: How?

LIGURIO: You persuade the abbess to give a potion that will make her abort.

FRA TIMOTEO: This is a matter that requires serious thought.

LIGURIO: Serious thought? Look, it will serve several good ends: you'll save the honor of the convent, the girl's and her relatives, return a daughter to her father, satisfy this gentleman and all his relatives, and do all the charity that 300 ducats allows, and on the other hand you'll be offending nothing but a chunk of unborn flesh, without feelings, which could be lost all the same in a thousand ways. I believe that the good is to be found in what does good for the most people and what makes the most people happy.

FRA TIMOTEO: So be it in the name of God. What you wish will be done, everything in the name of God and for charity . . .

LIGURIO: Now you seem to be the man of the church that I held you to be . . .

—Machiavelli, *The Mandrake Root*

* * *

Is it possible? What would it mean? It's certainly possible, though as we explore further, it likely meant far less than we think. Modern debates around abortion have isolated it as an act or practice that few in the Renaissance would recognize: always deliberate, always conscious, and always intended to remove a human fetus before it matures to term. The Renaissance had no such clarity. "Abortion" was a general term in a broad, gray area of symptoms for the sicknesses women might experience. A woman's whole being and health was thought to revolve around her uterus. Sickness too. A mild illness could indicate a simple imbalance in the uterus. A serious illness might be a uterus on the move—some doctors believed that it could travel around the body, wreaking havoc as it did. But the most common diagnosis of a woman's sickness was that her uterus was blocked. Something that ought to have regular flows had stopped for some reason. Since regular flows were the key to health, involving as they did the body's flushing itself of bad blood and other fluids, or "humors," a doctor's first instinct was to open up the blocked body and restore its natural flows. That simple act would release the toxic humors, returning the uterus to balance, and the whole woman to health. This called for some strong drugs.[1]

Teenage girls often had blocked bodies. Sexual maturity came later in the Renaissance than it does now, and malnutrition was so common that it was likely the rare adolescent girl who did *not* have problems with menstruation—doctors' manuals and herbals are full of recipes for precisely this complaint. The problem would be even worse in the Casa della Pietà, where girls were likely to be underfed and unhealthy when they entered, given only a subsistence diet based on bread, beans, and vegetables, and worked very hard. A result of this combination of low body fat, poor diet, and grueling work in adolescent girls would be precisely a "blockage" (amenorrhea), and it could also aggravate painful menstrual periods (dismenorrhea). And the same strong drugs were prescribed in lower doses.

These complaints and others might signal pregnancy. However, if a woman was nauseous and vomiting, if her breasts and belly swelled, if she was tired and moody, she might be pregnant, or she might have dropsy.

To ask whether the Pietà was terminating pregnancies when it prescribed these strong drugs is complicated. That may not be what Mona

Alessandra, the medica Margherita, or Marietta Gondi, the head of the Compagnia della Pietà, intended to do. However, we also need to ask why we might shy away from this conclusion. Certainly, most Renaissance Italian couples wanted children, and drugs, if they were used at all, were to improve fertility and increase the possibility of having babies. At the same time, storytellers such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Pietro Aretino certainly loved to weave extramarital sex into their love stories, and even if these stories showed no consequences, birth control was definitely practiced in the Renaissance. Narrators more often put unmarried girls than married women in their tales involving abortion because most couples spent their efforts trying to have children, not avoiding them. Most but not all—the Tuscan Franciscan preacher Cherubino da Siena (1414–84) wrote his late fifteenth-century guide, *The Rule of Married Life*, in Italian so that ordinary laypeople could read it, and he condemned couples who used special techniques in their lovemaking to avoid conceiving because they feared the cost or inconvenience of having children. Regardless, a home like the Pietà filled with nubile teenage girls would fit popular fictional stereotypes more than the home of a married couple or even a convent of nuns.[2]

“Abortion” meant far more than just birth control in the Renaissance. Does Ligurio’s conversation with Friar Timoteo about the Calfucci girl give us a sense of what ordinary people on the street thought or assumed about abortion? Does Friar Cherubino’s condemnation suggest that people both married and single found reasons to discretely control conceptions? What techniques and medications might have been available to the girls in the old Umiltà hospital at the corner of Via Nuova and Borgo Ognissanti, and how would they have come by this knowledge? What, in the conditions of the home and the lives of children like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena, might lead their guardians to this practice? Will finding answers to these questions bring us closer to understanding what was killing the girls of the Pietà?

In and Out of the Womb

Whatever might be growing in the Calfucci girl’s womb, it wasn’t human according to most Renaissance authorities. At least not for a few months, and there was no guarantee that it would be after those months had passed. As Ligurio puts it, what grew in her womb was just "a chunk of unborn flesh, without feelings . . . which could be lost in a thousand ways." Ligurio's timing was a bit off. To be human was to have a soul, and the fleshy growth in the womb acquired a soul forty or ninety days after conception, and sometimes even more—a girl's soul took longer to arrive. Aristotle had taught in *The History of Animals* that fetuses passed through a vegetative and an animal stage before finally becoming human once the rational soul entered the body. While many early Christian writers argued that all abortion from the time of conception was murder, Augustine returned to Aristotle's idea of "delayed ensoulment." In the absence of any fixed doctrine, this became the most widely accepted position. It was not just splitting hairs because women might generate a number of different things in their womb.

The womb was weird and wonderful but, above all, unknown and unpredictable. Apart from children, it could generate a "false pregnancy" or mole (*mola*), a fleshy growth that seemed at first to be a fetus but was actually a tumor that would make a woman ill if it was not expelled. The mole was thought to be generated either because of corrupt matter in the womb or due to an unfortunate alignment in the stars, and was popularly understood to be a fetus that had never progressed beyond the vegetative stage. Other fetuses might advance no farther than the animal stage. In his *Treatise of the Womb* (1481), Anthonius Guainerius, a professor of medicine at the University of Pavia, explained that a woman who had corrupt matter in her womb might conceive a toad or some other fatally poisonous animal together with an infant. The professor was adapting Hippocrates and Aristotle to give a scientific explanation for a story he had heard from peasants in Apulia. He also thought that weak seed from a man, or overly strong seed from a woman, could produce animalistic monsters.[3] Around the time that the Pietà was opening, another doctor spread the theory that having intercourse during menstruation would lead a woman to generate a monstrous birth. Monsters—not just deformed human fetuses, but beings with scales or animal parts—might also be generated miraculously if God decided to send a prophecy through a woman's womb. The monster might be a sign of impending disaster like floods, wars, or earthquakes that were God's response to human sinfulness. A few decades before, during the upheavals of the Italian wars and on the eve of the Reformation, many Italian women had given birth to monsters of just this sort, and they were publicized across Europe in news stories and illustrated pamphlets.[4]

In short, people believed a woman's womb might generate far more than infant children: "a chunk of unborn flesh." What grew, and how it grew, could be less due to simple intercourse than to the working of stars, matter, or God. Moles, monsters, and toads had no souls, and some of those who were prepared to see these kinds of vegetable or animal matter issuing from a woman's womb were also prepared to see a "purging of the womb" as good and necessary medical practice. It should never be done lightly, but it could be done without the guilt of committing murder. The key was the soul. Where Aristotle preferred to see the growth of arms and legs and the implanting of rationality as signs of humanity, Christian theologians zeroed in on the one thing that made the fetus a being in the image of God, under God's and the Church's protection—the soul.[5] The arrival of the soul, or *anima*, made the fetus human and made its removal murder.

No soul, no sin—this might be too convenient. Preachers, theologians, and churchmen never accepted this simple correspondence and aimed to close what laymen might take as a loophole. The scholastic philosopher Thomas Aquinas argued that terminating any pregnancy was still "a serious sin," even if only the removal of an animated fetus was murder.[6] Two Tuscans who did more than anyone to set the theological temperature of mid-fifteenth-century Italy spelled out the implications more concretely. Franciscan preacher S. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) condemned "sellers of ointments" for composing medicines that "they know to be corrupt and harmful," and he implicates abortifacients.[7] Dominican theologian Antonino Pierozzi, later Archbishop Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459), put it more bluntly: in a widely distributed guide for confessors, he wrote that doctors should be asked point-blank whether they have performed procedures that might terminate conception. He condemns apothecaries who "teach or sell what procures abortion [. . .] or if they sell poisons to those who they believe will abuse them." Abortion by any means "is a mortal sin."[8] Another charismatic reformer picked up the theme a few decades later. Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola was the grandson of a famous medical doctor and professor, Michele Savonarola, who had written a well-known gynecological textbook. While leading the monastery of S. Marco in Florence, Friar Girolamo became famous for his crusades against immorality and corruption and his call for deliberately Christian action in politics and in personal life. Like Antoninus, he believed that the confessor should ask a woman about her marriage and sex life. Did she only lie with her husband? Was he careful to plant his seed and not withdraw at the last minute? Did they have sex during her menstrual period or when she was pregnant?[9] These were some of the ways that people tried to avoid conception, and according to Savonarola, Antoninus, and Bernardino, they were all mortal sins.

Other theologians in the sixteenth century aimed to preserve the gray area that Aristotle had laid out. Tommaso di Vio Cardinal Cajetan (1468–1534), a Dominican theologian and Master General of the Order, agreed that the willful abortion of a living fetus is homicide. Yet he deliberately sets this "abortion is murder" stance into Aristotle's theory of generation, arguing that ending the pregnancy was only homicide if the fetus had been animated by the rational soul. If done before the time when the soul entered the body, then the man or woman who procured the abortion should not be charged with murder. A Spanish Jesuit theologian, Thomas Sanchez (1550–1610), went even further and posed the question: "May a woman who has been raped expel the seed?" He answered, a little clinically, that he thought this was indeed permissible because pleasure had not been the woman's goal in intercourse, and her insemination was not voluntary. Semen might be the seed of life, but it was not life itself. Certainly, both deliberate contraception and abortion of an "ensouled" fetus by herbs, potions, actions, or other means was both a homicide deserving punishment on earth and a mortal sin that would earn eternal punishment after death.[10]

These energetic theological debates were occurring when the Pietà women were cooking up their recipes in Borgo Ognissanti in the 1550s and 1560s. If they had been helping girls to terminate pregnancies in the first trimester, no law clearly called this murder. No church law and no civil law either, at least not in Italy. The law codes of Florence, Milan, Bologna, Venice, Naples, Perugia, and a host of other cities large and small make no mention of abortion, and certainly do not cast it as a punishable form of homicide. There was authoritative scientific opinion and even some informed theological opinion that held that expelling the thing growing in a girl's womb could be justified under certain circumstances.[11]

Within a few decades, a pope would try to make the issue more black and white and close the loopholes, and the results of his efforts are telling.

Sixtus V threw Aristotle aside and clearly identified all abortion as murder in his 1588 bull *Effraenatam*. He argued that those who "have no fear to kill most cruelly fetuses still hiding in the maternal viscera" should suffer "just punishment"—the same punishment as that doled out to murderers and assassins, regardless of whether they were male or female, and regardless of their "state, degree, order, rank and condition."[12] Sixtus brought the problem home to the Church by specifically including in his sweeping condemnation "clerics, [and those] pertaining to whatever religious Order, of whatever dignity and Ecclesiastic or worldly illustrious preeminence." In a culture that quite readily blamed and punished only the "erring" woman, Sixtus was having none of it. Any third party who helped abort a fetus "by means of blows, poisons, medicines, potions, weights, burdens, work and labor imposed on a pregnant woman," must receive the same punishments that "civil and profane law inflicts upon true murderers and assassins who have actually and really committed murder." Furthermore, anyone who advised a woman to abort a fetus or who helped her by preparing or administering "sterilizing potions, medicine, and poisons" would be equally guilty of homicide and would be subject to the same punishment. Closing the last loophole, Sixtus asserted that punishment went beyond earthly niceties of being found, charged, and tried: anyone directly or indirectly involved in an abortion was "automatically excommunicated."[13]

Effraenatam was the work of a reforming pope who stopped at little in his efforts to clean up his state, his clergy, and his laity. Yet within three years, it was a dead letter. Sixtus's successor Gregory XIV reversed Sixtus V's firm decree only five months after becoming pope. In his bull *Sedes Apostolica* (1591), he recognized that Sixtus's "hoped-for fruit" could not be achieved and that the automatic excommunications were backfiring—people were becoming less rather than more fearful of that ultimate penalty. So Gregory XIV went back to the earlier ambiguity, keeping the severe penalties only for those cases in which an ensouled fetus had been aborted and removing the threats of earthly or eternal prosecution from physicians, apothecaries, midwives, and anyone else who helped a woman abort before ensoulment. By some accounts, he pushed past Aristotle to 116 days, or just about the four months that Ligurio claims for the Calfucci girl in Machiavelli's *Mandrake Root*.[14] It would be almost three hundred years before the Catholic Church would return to the position that Sixtus V had set out and Gregory XIV had pulled back.[15]

What happened? In the wake of the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church had quite readily adopted novel, unpopular, and almost unenforceable doctrines and positions, secure perhaps in the knowledge that time, education, and steady prosecution by bishops and inquisitions would eventually bring dissenters into line. This suggests that Sixtus's firm position was not reversed because it was unenforceable. Rather, it pushed punitively beyond some broadly held views that Aristotle and Augustine themselves had ratified and that many clergy and laity still thought made good sense. It may also have challenged some entrenched self-interest. John T. Noonan, the author of studies on Catholic positions on usury and contraception, once argued that the Church dropped its firm medieval stance against usury because there was growing clerical self-interest involved. By the later Renaissance, many individual clerics and the institutional church were either needing or profiting from usury, and this set up the kind of steady pressure that eventually opened theologians to rethinking the earlier theological ban. Noonan argued that there was no similar clerical self-interest involved in contraception, and this was one reason why pressure to change the Church's doctrine or canon law never developed.[16]

The quick reversal of *Effraenatam*—directed so pointedly against priests, friars, and nuns—suggests that this may in fact have been an issue in which at least some clergy had a more than abstract interest. Moving ensoulment from 40 to 116 days turned a small loophole into a wide-open door. The chance to terminate a pregnancy within 116 days was convenient for any men or women who were not supposed to be having children. With Trent challenging an earlier nonchalance about priests keeping concubines and cracking down on nuns' ability to meet men in or out of the convent, clerical self-interest in matters of contraception and abortion had, if anything, increased by the later sixteenth century.[17] Sixtus V certainly thought so when he fingered them explicitly in *Effraenatam*. While he condemns all guilty parties, he expends the greatest amount of ink on clergy—priests, monks, and friars such as Friar Timoteo and nuns such as the unnamed abbess in the *Mandrake Root* who might advise, facilitate, oversee, or have an abortion.

So there was no doubt in Sixtus's mind that clergy were guilty and were perhaps even the leading sinners. Was he being realistic, or was he reading too many novelle like Pietro Aretino's *Raggionmenti*, Bracciolini's *Facetiae,* and Salternitano's *Novellino*, where happily fornicating nuns and friars are stock characters? Anticlericalism had fed satire for centuries, with few authors feeling much need to be realistic when imagining the many ways that monks, nuns, and priests could break their vows in pursuit of the pleasures of the flesh. It was a common satirical trope, and good for sales. But satire aside, Sixtus may also have recalled some embarrassing cases like that of Don Giovanni Pietro Lion, a priest executed publicly in 1561 for abusing his position as confessor at Venice's Convertite convent for former prostitutes. The scholarly and well-connected Lion, who had a reputation for piety and chastity, chose his mates by peeping in when they stripped for their baths, and then flattering, seducing, intimidating, imprisoning, and even beating the beautiful ones that he wanted to have sex with.[18] Venetian nuns themselves had been so notorious for their sexual exploits that in sermons preachers had long denounced their convents as public brothels.[19] But could their supposed license move into using abortifacients? Bishop and comic author Matteo Bandello (1485–1561) wrote early in the sixteenth century of a pregnant and desperate Pandora turning to a friar for the herbal remedies, diet, and bleeding that would rid her of a fetus already six months old.[20] Don Lion was charged with inducing abortions in the Convertite nuns he had impregnated, and some decades later, the Venetian state magistracy responsible for overseeing convent morality charged a layman Galeazzo Simitecolo for engaging in something other than spiritual exercises with nuns:

> Having gone in the company of others in boats, at night time, to the canal which runs alongside this convent in order to take her away, he lifted the said nun into a little boat, and brought her to a small and concealed lodging, where she had carnal copulation with the person who was waiting for her there. And, on another occasion, he took the nun to the same place along with another nun who was pregnant, leading her into the lodging where a midwife was waiting for her in order to advise her on how to get rid of the baby. And while the midwife and the pregnant nun were together, he tried everything to get the other nun to commit carnal commerce with him.[21]

These were a handful of cases, and we know of them because they were vigorously condemned and prosecuted. Most nuns were celibate and their convents anything but brothels. The most extravagant and violent sex crimes took place outside the religious houses. Yet the salacious exceptions generated ambiguities, even if they were merely fictional. Alongside Aquinas's conclusions, Bernardino's sermons, and Antoninus's guidance, there were Machiavelli's witty theologizing, Aretino's vigorously fornicating nuns and friars, and public cases like Don Lion servicing dozens of former prostitutes got up as nuns. It became all the more notorious when the Venetian executioner assigned to behead Don Lion botched the job and ended up literally hacking the priest to death while a horrified crowd looked on. Florentines heard similar tales of local friars turning the Orbatello widow's shelter into their own private brothel and of village priests beaten up when they impregnated local girls. They may have decided to take preachers' guidelines on sexual conduct with a grain of salt.[22]

The novellas and plays pushed to the fringes of imaginable behavior. We saw examples of incestual rape drawn from legal records in chapter 2, and some Italian and French authors also used this as the context for mentioning abortion. Giovanni Sercambi (ca. 1400) writes of a thirteen-year-old bride left in the safekeeping of her husband's sister who is then raped by her brother-in-law. The brother-in-law seeks an abortifacient from an apothecary, and when he's refused, he turns instead to a physician who assists him by diagnosing the pregnancy as a mole, so he can send the girl into hiding, deliver her baby, and give it away. He restores happiness all around by then giving the girl a treatment that makes her seem a virgin—"even tighter than before." A French miracle tale of roughly the same time has a guardian uncle sexually assaulting his ward so regularly that he impregnates her three times. He uses abortifacients to get rid of the first two fetuses, and when the girl tries to kill herself the third time, the Virgin Mary intercedes to save her.[23]

In short, Florentines in the sixteenth century lived in a theological and legal gray zone when it came to abortion. If the clergy could find room to disagree on what was permissible, what latitude was there for laymen and laywomen?

One of the problems of using *novelle* as a source of attitudes and practices is that few of the women in them get pregnant—most of the stories are all fun, with no consequences, which is more likely the wishful thinking of older male authors than the concrete reality facing young women. But there are some exceptions, particularly in Italian and French stories, where women like the *Mandrake Root*'s abbess might reach for drugs or techniques to prevent conception or stimulate miscarriage.[24] Doctors and pharmacists did not publish contraceptives or abortifacients openly, as they had in the classical period, because of custom, law, and censorship. Yet their manuals were full of information nonetheless. Sometimes abortifacient techniques were described under the heading of "precautions"—that is, things to be avoided to ensure a health pregnancy and a safe delivery. Other times, they were explained more openly as operations and medications meant to address general "complaints of the womb," or more pointedly to expel a stillborn baby, a mole, or an afterbirth. In short, the methods for achieving an abortion were easily found in almost any gynecological manual for midwives or doctors, even though they were never advertised as such. All it took was some imagination and some desperation for a woman to see that these same remedies could achieve results the doctor did not advise.[25]

Were a Pietà girl to approach the medica Margherita with a serious "complaint of the womb," how might the latter respond? The remedies in the Pietà *Ricettario*, if used at all, came as part of a broader package of care reaching back to such classical authors as Galen and Hippocrates. Medica Margherita would likely have begun treating the girl by working with the six "non-naturals" that governed health: air, diet, sleep, exercise, purging, and emotions. The first three might take the girl out of the crowded dormitory and into an infirmary, though we do not know whether the Umiltà hospital had enough rooms available to set one aside for this purpose. Regardless of where she brought the girl, Margherita's first efforts would be moderate and noninvasive. If there were no response, she might order physical action to stir up the womb: strenuous exercise, vigorous jumping, or even sneezing with the mouth shut. Margherita might also begin to purge the girl of the toxic humors that had built up inside of her. Expectorants would induce the vomiting necessary to clear out her stomach, and herbal diuretics and laxatives would clear the kidneys and bowels. Yet the womb was the real challenge. Doctor Guainerius had followed some classical authorities in recommending "fumigation," but this was awkward and could be expensive as it involved suspending the woman over a bed of burning coals on to which various items were placed—from donkey's hooves to elephant dung—so that the pungent foul odors would penetrate into the womb and loosen what lay in there. Margherita could have followed his less-expensive alternatives of bathing the vulva with vinegar and even masturbating the girl to expel the corrupt seeds and toxic humors that were throwing the womb out of balance and out of place.[26] If the girl's condition did not change, Margherita might consult one of the two medical men that the Pietà kept on retainer. Surgeon Maestro Simone handled bleeding, while Doctor Francesco Ruggieri dispensed medications.[27]

Bleeding was a common remedy doctors used to restore flows, to drain off the excess blood that caused high temperatures in fevered patients, or to expel the built-up poisons, or humors, that made patients lethargic, depressed, or sore. It took real skill to identify key veins and make small cuts with a razor. A wide range of texts from learned Latin treatises, such as the Italian doctor Ludovico Bonnacioli's *Two Books on Women* (1566), to more accessible vernacular works like the very popular and widely translated contemporary German midwives' manual called the *Rosegarden*, claimed that bleeding was the best way to restore a woman's menstrual flows, particularly bleeding from the left foot.[28] Bologna's medical board, the Protomedicato, actually banned the bleeding of pregnant women for precisely this reason—it would, they believed, trigger a miscarriage or an abortion and so could only be done when necessary, to expel a mole, a fetus that had died in the womb, or the afterbirth if it did not come down naturally.[29] This belief in the abortifacient effect of bleeding may be why two nuns in Salernitano's *Il Novellino* who have sex so frequently that they are often pregnant learned how to wield a razor so skillfully on each other.[30] However, bleeding was risky business. Trained nuns and monks commonly practiced on members of their own communities. Outside of convents and monasteries, only professionals like the Pietà's Maestro Simone had enough training to undertake the careful work. If it went too slowly, he might boost the flow of blood or toxic humors by putting a glass cup over the cut and heating it to create the vacuum that would draw the blood out more quickly. The records show that surgeon Simone certainly came in regularly to bleed the Pietà girls.

Medica Margherita could also call in Doctor Francesco Ruggieri when she had been unable to make any headway with a girl. Ruggieri was formally trained and experienced and may have been armed with his own selected set of proven medical recipes in a handy portable volume. One of his local colleagues, a Florentine Doctor Pagholo, had commissioned just such a manuscript from a scribe Hector Bandovinetti in 1515. Bound in durable calves' hide and written in a compact hand with spelling that suggests a good Florentine lisp, the paperback-sized book gave Doctor Pagholo everything he needed close at hand. Baldivonetti had copied well over a thousand recipes drawn from the impressive library of Florence's leading hospital of S. Maria Nuova, where Caterina, the Pietà's weaving mistress, had gone to be healed and where Mona Betta and many Pietà girls went to die.[31] Doctors frequently paid scribes like Baldovinetti to copy key selected recipes in personalized volumes that they could slip into their robes and consult as needed on their rounds, and Francesco Ruggieri may have had one as well. Piero Ispano's popular *Treasury of the Poor*, full of recipes for restoring flows and purging wombs, opens Doctor Pagholo's collection. There follows a veritable doctor's digest of recipes from leading physicians of the day and from those who worked within S. Maria Nuova like "house nurse" (*medicha di casa*) Madona Caterina. The choice of recipes suggests that Doctor Pagholo's Florentine patients had familiar concerns: beyond medicines for tertian fever, headache, and stanching a bleeding wound, we find remedies for turning hair blond and teeth white. Recipes are jumbled together in no particular order—the same page that has two recipes for restoring a woman's period includes a "wonderful tooth paste." It also confirms that the recipes in the Pietà *Ricettario* were not secret knowledge but were in wider circulation among contemporary Florentine doctors.[32]

We have already seen that the recipes were all for "simples," that is, remedies that incorporated a wide range of materials from plants, animals, rocks, and metals. Classical authorities, such as Dioscorides and Soranus, and medievals, such as the eleventh-century Benedictine monk Constantine the African or the thirteenth-century physician Arnald of Villanova, had ascribed abortifacient properties to a quarter of the ingredients found in these recipes. Some of them might strike us as strange and improbable. Old olive oil, chickpea or lupin flour, and fenugreek seem absolutely harmless. We might be more open to the possibilities inherent in more exotic ingredients like myrrh, opoponax, or galbanum, which were all resins drawn out of plants in Africa and Asia. Likewise, we might recognize the potency of roots like iris or aristolochia lunga, which was also known as hartwort or birthwort, and was (as the name implies) one of the most commonly known herbal abortifacients. Nine of the recipes included at least one of these ingredients, which is unlikely to have had a great effect. Three recipes have between three and five ingredients and bear looking into more closely. These three are attributed to medieval Islamic doctors: one to Avicenna (980–1037) and the other two, which are simply variations on each other, to Mesue (777–857). Muhammed had put ensoulment at 120 days, before which the fetus was "a blood-like clot" and "a lump of flesh," with the result that Muslim societies were far more tolerant of contraception and abortion. Some jurists even allowed women to practice abortion without informing their husbands. A further result was that Arabic doctors wrote more openly and frequently about abortifacients and contraceptives, drawing on classical sources and on their own explorations.[33]

Avicenna's remedy is for an unguent or ointment, and the medica Margherita could employ this either by spreading it on the belly or more likely by simply smearing it near and into the vagina. She prepared the ointment by dissolving the main active ingredients—myrrh, bdellio, glabano, and ammoniaco—in white vinegar and then boiling the liquor together with old olive oil, turpentine, pine resin, white wax, and litharge, a lead oxide with astringent properties that was often used to provoke vomiting or diarrhea. When the vinegar had boiled off, she added pulverized birthwort and opopanax and then stirred in copper acetate (verdigris) to create the smooth, thick paste.

Mesue's remedies are diachylons, or plasters, that incorporated various vegetable juices into a base of oil and lead oxide. If she were preparing it herself, Margherita would mix the finely ground lead oxide with old oil and stir them constantly over a slow fire until they were well cooked and mixed together. She'd let this cool before returning it to the fire and adding powdered iris root and the juices of fenugreek, linseed, altea, and melilot, which had all been allowed to rot a little until they had developed a slimy mucilage. In a variation on this, she could then add galbano and two saps or gums, ammoniac, and serapino.

Preparing the remedies would have taken more than a stove and pot. Medica Margherita might get some of the ingredients from a grocer or even prepare the vegetable mucilages herself, yet she could only buy the more potent items from a broker appointed by Florence's Guild of Doctors and Apothecaries, and she had to pay a special brokerage charge on top of the price. Avicenna's ointment would be the most expensive to produce, not only because it had the most ingredients overall but also because the apothecary had to provide almost half of them: iris, linseed oil, turpentine, resin, incense, and copper acetate.[34] The account books show that Margherita regularly purchased items from the guild's broker while the Pietà was in Borgo Ognissanti, though the books never itemize what these were. More of that detail came into the records after the Pietà moved, but by then, the purchases had dropped to only a small fraction of what they'd been earlier.[35]

We are accustomed to the idea that the most effective drugs are those that crush powerful synthetic chemicals into tiny pills to be taken with a glass of water; hence, applying ointments or plasters made of rotting vegetable matter, old olive oil, and assorted tree saps may seem ludicrous. That these spreads could actually trigger a miscarriage strains credulity. Yet the Pavian medical professor Anthonious Guainerius wrote, "I put more faith in plasters than in any other medicine," when it came to treating the womb, and he included in his *Treatise on the Womb* some that he claimed could actually stop a miscarriage once it had started.[36] John Riddle, the modern scholar who has done most to recover and assess the full range of "simples" used as abortifacients in cultures from the classical to the Renaissance periods, has found that most of them were effective to some degree, while some had a toxicity that made them potent. Riddle argues that plants or substances that didn't work at all would have dropped out of circulation; yet, a host of authors over the centuries and across different cultures credit birthwort, iris, and opopanax with stimulating a miscarriage when applied internally as a suppository or pessary, or even externally as a plaster or ointment. Modern medical research substantiates this by clarifying the chemical properties involved. Of the ones found in the Pietà *Ricettario*, he believes "they combine various early and late term abortifacients, and would have caused changes to a woman's hormonal balance that could terminate a pregnancy."[37]

Workers, Sex, and Sex Workers

If we think that abortifacients might have been used regularly inside the walls of the Pietà, does this reduce the place itself to a brothel? Might that explain the silences, evasions, and cover-ups? Where did the Pietà get the recipes? What do we know about who was running the home?

It's certainly unlikely that the Pietà was a brothel, although at least some of its girls faced the likelihood of sexual assault. Had the Pietà girls opened their doors to paying customers, like the civic brothel a few blocks to the north, they couldn't have avoided leaving a wide track in contemporary records like the census, the Onestà registers, and popular literature. When two resident supervisors of Lyon's Hôtel-Dieu had begun running a high-end brothel out of that charitable hospital a few decades earlier, rumors percolated through the city until the notorious Mère Hilaire and Mère Couronnyée were expelled and escorted all the way to Paris.[38] Authors of carnival songs and plays were always sniffing around for subject matter, and none picked up rumors of prostitution at the Pietà. No mocking or moralizing fingers point to organized sexual activities inside the Pietà, so we need to look more closely at what was happening to the girls getting out. We already saw that some younger girls went out in the streets a few times a week to collect alms of bread, wine, and money, but they were so young and under such tight escort that it's unlikely that they were subject to assaults. The only other group of girls who left the home and sometimes returned were those contracted to be domestic servants. Perhaps we need to look more closely again at what their situation involved, and why so many returned to the Pietà before their contracts were up—sometimes within weeks or months. Chapter 3 looked at this question in terms of their work skills, but it wasn't just laziness, theft, or a lack of skills that led to broken contracts. Adolescent girls working as domestic servants were the most vulnerable women in Florence to sexual assault. It was the same across Europe, yet sexual assault was even worse for orphans and abandoned girls. Lacking fathers or brothers to defend them or to take vengeance for assaults, they were vulnerable to exploitation by the men who employed them.

We already saw earlier that domestic service was less a job than a life stage for many young women from laboring, poor, and rural families. It defined the period before marriage for a number of reasons, the least of which was age. These girls depended absolutely on their employers to make marriage possible. It's common to sympathize with the difficulties of poor and laboring families in accumulating the dowries needed to allow a daughter to marry. Yet we may be mistaken in applying to their case the complaints we hear from Florentines higher on the social scale—everyone from guild masters to merchants to magnates. We shouldn't assume that laboring families had the same difficulty accumulating dowries as the families of artisans, professionals, and patricians. Not because they had the money, but precisely because the chances of saving a dowry while feeding, clothing, and sheltering a family on the proceeds of irregular unskilled day labor were so slight as to be a pure abstraction or a bad joke. Many of these families exchanged modest dowries. Depending on their aspirations, the dowry could still be equivalent to a year's wages for a laboring man—a virtually impossible sum for a laborer to accumulate. As a result, families pooled their efforts: grandmothers, uncles, and brothers all kicked in, as did confraternity members, parish priests, and patricians returning a favor or fostering dependence. Yet even with all this collective effort, a girl of the laboring classes knew that if she wanted to marry, she would need to earn her own dowry. The best—virtually the only—way to do that was to contract as a domestic servant. Families did this with their daughters and guardians with the orphaned or abandoned girls who had been dumped suddenly into their care. As we saw in chapter 3, institutions like the Pietà did it with girls that they wanted to move out of the dormitory and back into society.

A girl who became a servant in the Renaissance was not an individual who was taking on a job. She was swallowed up by another household and gained whatever identity and rights she enjoyed from her association with it. At a certain level, she was little more than property or a "chunk of flesh" dependent on and even defined by the household she had joined. The girl lived in the home like any other family member and, to a certain extent, was treated like an adolescent daughter, although never with even the limited rights and privileges that the daughter enjoyed. An extreme case highlights the assumptions at work here. Florentine prostitutes were initially forbidden to keep adolescent girls as servants. When this law turned out to be too hard to prosecute, the Onestà magistracy that supervised prostitution shifted its position and announced that all young women employed as domestic servants by prostitutes would have to register as prostitutes themselves and pay all the necessary fees—even if they were daughters, nieces, or other relatives. This was certainly a cash grab, but it also reflected the common assumption that a servant was a full and functioning member of a household and was completely identified with the work and life that went on there.[39]

Had either Margherita, Maria, or Maddalena lasted long enough to leave the Pietà as a servant, she could expect basic food, clothing, and shelter in return for her work, which would become more complicated and demanding as she became older and capable of more jobs. The clothing in particular might be spelled out in the contract precisely to avoid arguments and would be spelled out in terms of an annual allotment. Most girls could expect no more than a single pair of new shoes and a certain number of shirts and skirts per year. There was no regular pay or at least nothing beyond some pocket money. The real payoff came as a lump sum at the end of the contract period. If that was a year, then there were seldom any further obligations on either side, and by mutual agreement, master and servant might decide to part ways. However, as we saw earlier, if the girl was working for her dowry, then the contract period extended to five years or more, and the underlying dynamic of personal relations with her employers subtly but definitely shifted. She was now far more dependent on her employer, both for the dowry and for the good will he would exercise when finding a husband for her—for this, too, became part of the contract. The employer took on the father's role and the chief duty of finding a spouse.

The longer a girl was under contract, the more likely that her employer acted on the understanding that she, like his own children, was his property. But an invisible line always kept her at a distance because his personal honor was not wrapped up in her actions the way it was in the actions of his own blood daughter. This did not give her much more freedom than a daughter, although it tended to give him far greater license than a father. Sometimes the resulting cases made it to the criminal court of the Otto di Guardia. In 1560, Antonio di Capitan Luca Mazzaranga was charged with raping his servant girl Maddalena di Angola di Ariana. A year later, Giovanni di Antonio Gherardini, a Florentine citizen, was answering charges that he had repeatedly battered his servant girl Marghettia da Borselli while trying unsuccessfully to get her to do *inoneste* (shameful) things with him.[40]

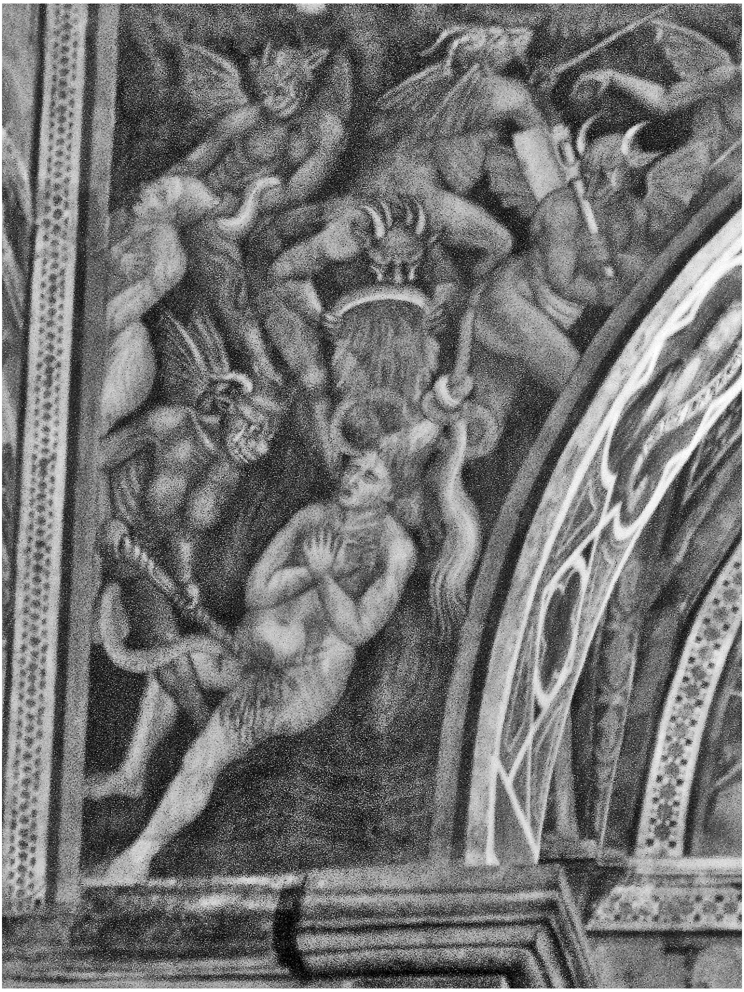
Antonio and Giovanni may have ended up on trial because Maddalena's and Marghettia's brothers or father stepped in. Only a fraction of these assaults ever made it to court because either the girl had no family protectors or because the rapist was persuaded, forced, or shamed into providing a dowry that would remove her from the house quickly and quietly. This was part of society's double standard: assault of the servants by father, son, male relatives, or guests was so common as to be almost expected, but if consequences emerged, then the assailants or those adults responsible for them had to take responsibility and make amends, which could generate other tensions, as one of Florence's richest families found. When Carlo Strozzi conceived a child with his servant girl Agnoletta, he was so taken with their baby boy, Paolo, that he set mother and son up in a home of their own in Florence and ordered his heirs to give Agnoletta the use of a small house and some lands out in the countryside—they even received a set quantity of wine annually. Carlo's indulgent treatment earned the child the nickname "the Little Priest" (*il Pretino*). But Carlo's generosity grated on his heirs, and once he was out of the way, they took steps to cancel the legacy.[41]

One horrific case involving a patrician family came closer to the Pietà. In 1559, the Otto prosecuted Giovanni, son of Girolamo da Sommaia, for physically abusing two servants, a girl Susana di Francesco da Manfriano in the Mugello, and a male, Niccolo di Orlando from Portico di Romagna. These servants were likely around the same age as or a little younger than nineteen-year-old Giovanni. Luring them into the house at night, he beat Niccolò repeatedly. He then stripped Susana naked and began striking her repeatedly too, sometimes with a belt and sometimes with a torch. Eventually, he put the burning torch to her vagina. This went beyond rape to the fantasies of a psychopath. Perhaps he thought that he was a prophetic agent of God's judgment. Inside the door of the Collegiata Church in San Gimigniano is a fresco showing sinners enduring as their eternal torment the endless repetition of whatever sin had landed them in hell. In the lower left corner, a devil torments a prostitute by plunging a torch into her vagina (see p. 105). Giovanni may have seen the fresco, or some other like it, while traveling around Tuscany with his father Girolamo, a Florentine senator, and a prominent member of the ducal court who frequently served in key magistracies that took him to different parts of the duchy.[42] As Florence's highest court, the Otto di

Guardia didn't stop to consider whether young Giovanni was a prophet or psychopath but fined him the enormous sum of 600 ducats and exiled him to Sicily for four years. Weeks after his son's conviction, Senator Girolamo da Sommaia made out his will. The first item is the gift of his city house and garden to the girls of the Pietà, who lived only a block away. There follow gifts of cash and farms to his three married daughters and an enormous dowry for his one unmarried daughter. Son Giovanni gets nothing except his mother's legacy and his father's debts, including, naturally, the 600-ducat fine. When making out this will, Girolamo wasn't sure whether young Giovanni would ever be allowed back into Florence. He made some later gifts conditional on that return, including a carefully enumerated list of beasts that would come to Giovanni from various family farms.[43]

The servant girl Susana di Francesco da Manfriano who suffered Giovanni's abuse was not one of the Pietà girls, though many did indeed come from the Mugello Valley north of Florence as she did. Senator Girolamo da Sommaia's gift was a way for him to punish a violent son by reducing the value of his inheritance and to make a public and appropriate restitution. The legacy was an accepted way of making amends and of beginning to rebuild the family's honor. Girolamo died less than two years later, unsure of whether that honor would ever be restored.

Money could get servant girls out of the way and restore family honor, but what if the rape resulted in a pregnancy? We can now access Florence's baptismal records online, and they show that many of the babies baptized in the city in the 1550s were illegitimate.[44] Some fathers raised their bastard children directly, as Carlo Strozzi had, but most did so indirectly through institutions or payments to the mothers. We saw earlier that Florence's sexual landscape had been changed significantly a century earlier with the opening of a foundling home, the Ospedale degli Innocenti, precisely for these children. Some had been born only hours before, and most were abandoned before they were a few weeks old. The overwhelming number were illegitimate, and most cases, the mothers were servant girls. We can't be entirely certain because the Innocenti's founders had arranged it so that infants could be abandoned anonymously, initially on a font outside the door, and eventually by a turntable at the side of the building. Depositing a baby was easy as turning the wheel and watching it disappear out of sight.



Torture of a Woman by a Demon. Detail of Taddeo di Bartolo, *Last Judgement*, Collegiata Church, S. Gimigniano. Used with permission of Art Resource.

Many people turned that wheel. Between 1530 and 1540, the Innocenti took in 5,400 children, with 1,000 of these in 1539 alone. This number represented almost 40 percent of all babies baptized in the city that year, twice the level earlier in the decade. Abandonments then dropped for a few years, but shot up again to between 20 percent and 40 percent of births from the late 1540s into early 1550s.[45] Some of these babies came from outside the city, but clearly, many illegitimate children were conceived in mid-sixteenth-century Florence. Most were likely the results of assault on servant girls and slaves. These were the years when the Pietà was being planned and established, and we should keep this in mind when assessing whether, how, and for whom the home may have been preparing abortifacients.

Before opening the Ospedale degli Innocenti, Florentines blamed the deaths of their "innocents" on desperate unmarried mothers who threw their illegitimate babies into the Arno River or left them on the street. This was being economical with the blame because it was in fact fathers' failure to recognize and support these infants that led to their abandonment. The Innocenti foundling home was the fathers' collective answer, and we have to recognize that, for at least some of its sponsors, supporting it was not a disinterested act of charity. Their own illegitimate sons and daughters passed through the turntable and sheltered there.

Looking past the warm rhetoric about Christian charity, we must recognize that the Innocenti was essentially an institutional support for extramarital intercourse that operated on much the same level as the civic brothels. The two institutions were complementary. Both allowed Renaissance Florentine men of different ages to have sex outside of marriage without disturbing the restrictive sexual code that they upheld whenever they locked their own unmarried daughters and sisters safely in the house. The foundling home allowed an adult man to dispose quietly of any children conceived with his servant girls. The brothel allowed his son to get all the sex he needed—and recall that contemporary medical theory assumed that for adolescent boys sex was a physical need and not just a desire—without endangering the morals or marriage prospects of respectable girls in the family's own social class. These institutional supports complemented each other on another level as well. Bearing the master's child usually cost a girl her position as a servant, and if he refused to make provision for her, she could end up on the streets, perhaps even in the brothel.

These are some of the sexual politics facing poor adolescent girls in Renaissance Florence, and servant girls most of all. Are they relevant to our question about whether the girls who left the Pietà as servants may have used abortifacients? We have to set the context by sweeping away any modern assumptions we may have that social inferiors, women, or children were considered to be individuals with inherent rights. Sexual inequality was written into Florence's laws. A man who raped a widow, a married woman, or a virgin from a respectable family could be fined 500 lire, but if he raped a servant girl, he was fined only 25 lire. Raping a woman considered a prostitute brought no fine at all.[46] The strange adolescent servant girl in the household was like the unknown growth in the womb or the illegitimate baby conceived by the employer: living things, admittedly, but without much inherent value, let alone individual rights and, as such, expendable. Removal—of girl, of infant, of "unborn chunk of flesh"—worked to the health of the host. Because the host's health ranked far higher on everyone's scale of values, removal was not just a permissible but a morally preferable act. This line of reasoning seems breathtakingly brutal today, but many in the Renaissance era accepted it as self-evidently sensible.

In chapter 3, we met Pietà girls like Domenica of Michelino Metignoli who signed contracts with a number of masters but never finished any of them, and Nannia of Stefano da Romita who fled from a wool master's house only two weeks after arriving as a servant. We need to go back to these girls, using the matriculation list to re-create their backgrounds and situations. Prioress Mona Alessandra of the Pietà sent about 13 percent of her girls out as servants into homes around Florence in those early years. She knew that some of them—perhaps most of them—would be sexually assaulted. In these years, the companion home of S. Maria delle Vergine was trying to send its girls out as well but without much success. At least a third of its girls went out on contract, but two-thirds of them returned within weeks or months, and most of the remainder fled. They may have been ineffective servants and so were dismissed. S. Niccolò did rather better in placing its girls for the long term, although that may simply be a failure of records to note returns. What sociological factors bear on this? First, the S. Maria delle Vergine girls were from a somewhat higher social class and likely did not take to service as readily as the lower-ranged S. Niccolò and Pietà girls. Beyond that, more of the S. Niccolò girls came from Florence and may have had male relatives to support them, defend them, or negotiate for them as the need arose. By contrast, almost two-thirds of the Pietà girls came from outside the city.[47]

Is it possible that the remedies found in the recipes were used either for girls who had returned from, or for girls who were about to go out to domestic service? The logical steps are there. A fundamental purpose of the Pietà was to save girls from prostitution. Servant girls in general and orphanage girls in particular were vulnerable to sexual assault. If the assault resulted in a pregnancy, the longer-term consequences would almost certainly include abandonment of the infant to the Innocenti and a second abandonment of the girl, this time to prostitution.

But logical consequence is not historical causality. Before pursuing this further, we should turn to the second question: If these recipes are for abortifacients, from whom would the Pietà nurses get the information? We've already seen that the neighborhood was an industrial slum, and the corner of Borgo Ognissanti and Via Nuova was where two of Florence's oldest professions—wool and prostitution—met. The Pietà was at the edge of one of Florence's red-light districts, and the girls' neighbors right down the length of Via Nuova were streetwalkers and courtesans.

The 1562 census records 134 prostitutes. Twenty-one of them are clustered in the neighborhood of Borgo Ognissanti, Via Nuova, and Via Palazzuolo, making it the highest concentration in the city. These were just the registered prostitutes, that is, those who played by the Onestà's rules and paid their 15 lire license fee every three months. Women far outnumbered men in this neighborhood, and it's unlikely they spent their time spinning wool.[48] Cosimo I's efforts at moral reform had aimed to curb the activities of those prostitutes working outside the brothels by designating particular streets on which they could practice. The area around the Pietà turned out to be a good source of revenue for him, the prostitutes, and the Onestà. Most likely the prostitutes clustered here because the various wool and silk workshops had attracted working men who had moved in from the countryside leaving their wives and families behind.

It may surprise us how matter of fact the whole activity was, and that the Church was deeply involved. Many preachers denounced the sex trade, but that did not stop the Chapter of the Cathedral of S. Maria del Fiore from renting its properties to prostitutes. It was the largest single landowner on Via Nuova, which ran along the west side of the Pieta, and the majority of its tenants were prostitutes. The clerical landlords paid no attention to the law prohibiting prostitutes within 100 braccia (or 200 feet) of a church—there were at least three churches in the immediate neighborhood. The tenants appreciated the irony and actually made the most of it: one who rented from the cathedral chapter used a close variant of the cathedral's name as her professional calling card—La Maria Fiorenza. It was similar to another prostitute elsewhere in town who used the feminine version of "The Little Bishop."[49] The friars of Ognissanti were the second biggest landowners on the street and in the surrounding neighborhood, and they too counted many prostitutes among their tenants. It is all recorded dryly in the census *ricerca*.[50]

The Via Nuova prostitutes certainly knew about the teenaged girls living at the corner, even if few of them pledged money to the home or sent their own daughters there. Yet they could have dropped coins in the collection boxes that the Pietà girls brought around the streets. And they may have dropped advice about abortifacients to medica Margherita at the Pietà's back door. Playwrights and novella writers usually showed prostitutes as seeking to have children to have a hook with which to blackmail funds from their partners. The savvy whore Nana in Pietro Aretino's *Dialogues* does this frequently; yet, in all her famous lessons for aspiring whores, she gives no tips about contraception or abortion. Some prostitutes did have children, but many did not, so we may be back in the realm of male fantasy about women's secret knowledge. Doctors claimed that the more active a prostitute was, the harder time she would have conceiving. The intense activity overheated the womb to the point of sterility, while the sperm from too many different men confused it. However, some of these same prostitutes may have been applying Avicenna's ointments and Mesue's plasters when their wombs seemed to become blocked and no longer flowed at the regular period. And unlike Aretino's Nana, they may have shared this knowledge with other women and girls who might need it.[51]

It's a tempting thesis. A savvy courtesan worth her reputation would have known her literature and might well have heard of the Arabic doctors whose remedies helped girls in need. Would she pass this on with the small error that points to conversation rather than reading—his unguent is written in the Pietà *Ricettario* as "Da Vicenna" or "of Vicenna" rather than "d'Avicenna" ("of Avicenna"). Yet tempting as it is, we can definitively dismiss the idea of prostitutes coming to the back door of the Pietà to share whispered recipes. Although the women who copied out the *Ricettario* hid their recipes in the inner pages of an old ledger, their source was out in plain view. What looks initially like caution may have been nothing more than a search for blank paper. All the recipes, with the single exception of the one for ringworm, come from the official medical guide produced by Florence's Guild of Doctors and Apothecaries on orders from Duke Cosimo I and published just a few years before the Pietà opened its doors. This was not a portable guide such as Doctor Pagholo's handy personalized pocketbook of a thousand recipes for every complaint under the sun or moon. *The Recipe Book of the Guild and Association of Doctors and Apothecaries of the City of Florence* (*El Ricettario del l'arte, et universita de medici, et spetiali della citta di Firenze*) was a printed folio-sized volume of two hundred pages that described ingredients (often following Dioscorides); explained methods of preparation for ointments, infusions, syrups and the like; and then gave the recipes—all 548 of them.[52] There was some repetition, though not of the haphazard kind that characterized Doctor Pagholo's guide. The heading given in the Pietà manuscript suggests that *El Ricettario* (*The Recipe Book*) is the source for the collection described as *Del Ricettario* (*Of/From the Recipe Book*). The recipes are identical, right down to the frustrating failure to indicate when, how, why, or on whom they might be used.

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In Italian *novelle*, pregnant unmarried girls usually had to be protected from their fathers and brothers because their condition undermined family honor. Honor could be restored only by killing the girl. In French tales, by contrast, families collaborated in protecting the girl. In both literary traditions, mothers were the ones who helped their daughters most directly. French author Bonaventure Des Périers wrote, in a book of novelle published posthumously in 1558, "Mothers make sure that their daughters will not be taken advantage of too soon, or they know how to remedy the unfortunate accidents when some surprise has occurred."[53] This put a widower's daughter in a difficult situation unless some other woman would take a motherly interest in her.

This brings us to our third question: who was behind this home and its many puzzles? We need to look beyond the resident Prioress Mona Alessandra to see who was ultimately running the Pietà. We have already encountered Marietta Gondi as the head of a group of patrons who annually pledged to support the home. What's important about this group is that they numbered in the hundreds, and all of them were women. *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* mentions a group of more than two hundred women who supported the home financially, but it says little more about them. It is time to go back to other manuscripts and historical records to take a closer look at them. Who were they, and what did they do?

The Pietà's financial ledgers prove particularly revealing on a number of levels. While *The Chronicles* may say a lot about the clerics involved in the home and little about the women, the ledgers reverse this. The women's activities are evident everywhere, and the clerics come up only when it is time to make the regular monthly payments for performing religious services. Each of the archival manuscripts for these early years advertises on the cover and on the first page that it is a "Book of the Women and Girls of the Pietà." Financial daybooks end with the note that sums have been transferred to a "Book of the Women," indicating that they kept a close eye on accounts. The pledge books are most interesting because they show that this group eventually numbered almost four hundred. Apart from a friar of S. Croce, there was not a single male member. The Pietà was supported almost exclusively by women. There is no parallel in any other home in Florence, and few examples elsewhere in Italy.

The women's names appear in three separate lists produced in different times. The first is the list found at the beginning of the curious volume that has the medical recipes hidden on its inside pages. It was used first as a membership register covering the years 1554–55, and totals sixty-two names. The cover of the manuscript bears the title "Quarter of San Giovanni For the Santa Pietà," suggesting that there ought to be parallel volumes for the quarters of S. Maria Novella, S. Croce, and S. Spirito, but none of these others remain. The reason may lie with the second manuscript, a single volume that starts at the same time and tracks the pledges of 320 women from across Florence who signed up through the fall of 1554 and in the years of rapid expansion that followed. A third volume records what remained of these women by 1567. After the heady start of only thirteen years earlier, barely more than a tenth remained: only thirty-six women in a group whose numbers continued to drop. The Compagnia della Pietà was collapsing. Only nine women joined through the 1570s, and only seventeen more by 1606 when the record ends.[54]

Does the Compagnia della Pietà's sudden rise and protracted decline hold an answer to the question of what was killing the girls in the home?

Women's organizations were sometimes short-lived, so we need to put a clearer face on this remarkable group of women. A few things are immediately apparent. Many of them were widows. Most of their pledges were for less than 2 lire, and only 18 of the first year's group of 270 gave more than a scudo, which was valued at 7 and a half lire. At the same time, a significant number of these women came from prominent families. The list includes a role call of the Florentine elite: three Medici, four Antinori, six Ricasoli, seven Ridolfi, and eleven Capponi. Yet interestingly, the largest of the matriculation ledgers frequently records the women's names in an untraditional way that was just beginning to spread among elite women. While a widow would usually continue to use the name of her late husband, many of these women simply used family names. Hence, in place of "Maddalena of the deceased Piero Antinori" (Maddalena del quondam Piero Antinori, or Maddalena del fu Piero Antinori), a woman in the group was often registered simply as "Maddalena of the Antinori" (Maddalena degli Antinori). Before this, the only other women in Florentine society who had regularly failed to identify themselves by the names of either husbands or fathers were nuns and prostitutes.[55]

There is one further detail. The Florentine historian and archivist Rosalia Manno Tolu has written extensively on some of the conservatories in Renaissance Florence and has done intensive background work on the men and women who supported them. An expert in the period, she has the added benefit of unparalleled access to manuscript records as director of the Florentine State Archive. Her work shows that the group of women supporting the Pietà did indeed have something important in common, although that factor makes their actions and the abortifacient recipes even harder to figure out.[56] The women of the Compagnia della Pietà were members of the most fundamentalist religious group in Florence at the time, followers of the charismatic preacher who had railed against immorality and corruption and had been burned as a heretic six decades earlier: the friar Girolamo Savonarola.

CHAPTER FIVE

Renaissance Fundamentalists and Girls in Trouble

MADAM ANTONIA: Great are the struggles and torments of this life. Lord God help us all, and especially the likes of me, a poor widow, alone and abandoned by everyone. Shoot! Sometimes I wish I was never born, and yet my faith in the Lord, my fastings and prayers give me much hope, if not in this life, then for the other. But since I must and want to live while it pleases heaven, and not having my usual income—which in the past was quite sizeable—nor any other earnings, I'm forced, in order to eat, to accommodate now this person, now that one, with whatever they need. That's how I earn my living, and that's what I have to keep doing until I die. That's why I agreed to help Giannino, who's promised to pay me enough money to keep me well for a few days. But why is she taking so long to come out?

GIANNINO: Come along already, you look as if you're going to the gallows.

ANTONIA: You're making me do, in my old age, what I never would have done when I was young.

GIANNINO: Well, didn't I pay you enough? That should take care of both your honor and your needs. . . . [to Sandra] What took you so long?

SANDRA: I had to spruce up a little bit; did you want me to look like some wench?

GIANNINO: You smell like a barbershop.

SANDRA: All right, let's get this over with. What do I do? Mona Antonia, did you get the money?

ANTONIA: Not yet, he says we'll get it later.

SANDRA: How much?

ANTONIA: Two ducats apiece.

SANDRA: That's all?

GIANNINO: Why you filthy . . . ! That's all this is worth.

ANTONIA: All right Giannino. Enough with this talk. Just get the money.

GIANNINO: We're all set. Look we've reached the door already, go in this way. . . .

—Antonfrancesco Grazzini, *La pinzochera*

* * *

And so the pious and once-wealthy widow Mona Antonia, pimping her daughter Sandra, accompanies servant Giannino in a plot to allow his aged master Gerozzo to bed the beautiful young wife of his neighbor. Only it's even more complicated than that—in Antonfrancesco Grazzini's *La pinzochera* nothing is as it seems, and not just because the magic medicine balls that are supposed to render you invisible don't actually work.

Mona Antonia represented everything that Renaissance Florentines hated: the pious hypocrite who could moralize and temporize in a single breath. Did she also represent the widows who ran the Pietà: sheltering abandoned girls only to prostitute them? Feeding them contraceptives and abortifacients to keep them working without the break of an inconvenient pregnancy? Florentines had their suspicions, which worked into their very words. The Italian word *pinzochera* described respectable widows who vowed to live pious lives of poverty and charity, who often lived communally to keep costs down, and who took in orphans to earn a little money. But in Florentine slang, *pinzochera* meant a bawd or female pimp.

Of all the puzzles multiplying around this investigation, this is the strangest. Savonarola was burned as a heretic, but his "heresy" was to denounce, in the most fiery and judgmental terms, political abuse, sexual immorality, and the wealthy and soft-living clergy who had captured the upper levels of the Church. As we saw, he specifically slammed abortion. Savonarola's message resonated across northern Italy in the 1490s, and Florence was the epicenter of a Savonarolan movement that included misfits, moralizers, and malcontents, but also philosophers such as Pico della Mirandola, painters such as Sandro Botticelli, and many widows. Savonarola saw widows as wise, pious, and chaste guardians of the social order, and they responded by forming one of the strongest corps among his dedicated followers.[1] Some followers drifted away, but the true believers took Savonarola's execution in 1498 as martyrdom. They remained an organized, active, highly driven and very Catholic group in religious and political life for decades thereafter. How likely is it that they could be procuring abortions for teenage girls in the 1550s and 1560s?

That we now remember Savonarola as a moralizing and hypocritical kill-joy, who torched paintings, books, and playing cards in elaborate "bonfires of the vanities" in Florence's main square, says as much about us as about him. He has become the archetypal "fundamentalist," with all the anachronistic associations of this twentieth-century term. Popular novels inevitably portray Savonarola as the rabid and manipulative proponent of a repressive creed that crushes everything we take to be humane in the Renaissance: emotions, creativity, rationality, and progress. He is an opportunist and hypocrite who uses violence and intimidation to achieve self-serving ends—he is the anti-Renaissance personified.

Look back a century or more, and a different Savonarola emerges from popular novels and histories: a simple-living believer in democratic and representative government who advocated separating church and state and promoted a fundamentally interior religion that valued personal integrity, morality, and care for the needy and dispossessed. This image was just as anachronistic. Within Italy, nationalists frustrated with the Catholic Church's opposition to Italian unification had seized on Savonarola's denunciation of papal political meddling and turned him, ironically, into a national political hero who championed the separation of church and state. Outside Italy, Protestants had drafted the friar into their pantheon of heroes who, in the generations before Martin Luther, fought the good fight against the Catholic Church, even though he likely would have denounced Luther even more vociferously.[2]

Like any controversial figure, Savonarola's current image has been thoroughly shaped by the aspirations and revulsions of popular culture. The same struggle for the mantle, identity, and image of Savonarola raged through the sixteenth century. His rise to power and public burning was thoroughly tied into the politics of the pro- and anti-Medici factions in Florentine civic life. That his followers could be tagged as the "Weepers" or "Snivelers" (i.e., *piagnoni*) because of their displays of public piety shows how many Florentines found them to be exasperatingly self-righteous. It also testifies to the power of the pithy insult in public relations.

These Snivelers were focused, determined, and organized around the goal of building a holy city. Yet we should not project on to that vision all that it might mean in modern terms. They certainly were moralists who frowned on nudes, paganism, and promiscuity. The bonfires of the vanities did burn. And Savonarola did recruit a corps of pious adolescent thugs who moved through town terrorizing gamblers, gay men, and blasphemers. However, in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this unlikely alliance of humanists, widows, politicos, nuns, and teenagers gathered the most determined proponents of republican government in Florence. They were prepared to fight and die in pursuit of an enlightened and egalitarian social order that gave a voice to marginalized groups like women and children, that provided generous social services to the poor, and that took political power away from the institutional church. While differences emerged within a decade of Savonarola's execution, the Snivelers remained a reasonably coherent group through the first three decades of the sixteenth century when their fight was with the Medici. They fell to fighting seriously among themselves during the upheavals of the last republic of 1527–30. The cracks widened through the next decades: laity versus clergy, men versus women, and hardliners versus moderates, with all the many variations possible on that theme. The original Savonarolan ideology fundamentally shaped the Pietà's origins and early development, while the later fissures split it apart and sent it into different directions.[3]

If we identify the women who opened the Pietà in 1554 as Savonarolan *piagnoni*, what does it actually mean? Were they closet bawds or determined activists? Grazzini doesn't identify Mona Antonia as a *piagnone*, but her overt piety points in that direction, while her blatant hypocrisy suggests just how cynical Florentines had become about the motivations of pious society ladies who had fallen on hard times after becoming widows. We need to get a clearer picture of who they were, and how the Pietà may have become not just a home for girls but also an institutional pawn in a much-wider power struggle that was unfolding in late Renaissance Florence. This means exploring a wider range of questions about the Pietà's origins and later changes. Do the power struggles swirling around and within the Savonarolan movement put some of the Pietà's unique features and its early history in a different light? What were the home's roots before it opened in 1554, and was its later move out of Borgo Ognissanti related to power struggles within the Savonarolan ranks? What of its eventual transition into a convent? Above all, who were these women? Pimps or pietists? Could a group of fundamentalists really get involved in distributing abortifacients? And will this raft of questions help explain why so many of the Pietà girls were dying?

Savonarola's Women in Medici Florence

Friar Girolamo Savonarola moved to Florence in 1490 after a building a reputation across northern Italy for powerful preaching that was prophetic, urgent, and socially engaged.[4] He had joined the Dominican Order at age twenty-two and, after a rough start, gained a reputation for a sharp intellect and a sharper tongue. Lorenzo de' Medici lobbied the Dominicans to transfer to Florence this charismatic preacher who packed churches and squares. He would be a fitting ornament to the city and to the monastery of S. Marco that the Medici family had heavily patronized since the days of Cosimo the Elder. Savonarola maintained good relations with his patron and was among those at Lorenzo's deathbed in 1492. But he soon directed his powerful preaching against the Medici's regime and called for a return to Florence's earlier political practices when power was shared more broadly and the city was a holy place. Savonarola was certainly a traditionalist. Yet all Renaissance reformers were traditionalists —their differences lay in the tradition they appealed to and wanted to see reborn in their own day. Classical Latin tradition? Early Christian tradition? Medieval Communal tradition? Few were innovators. All assumed that the path to the future led through the past and that what had to be recovered was not just techniques or ideas, but virtue—that is, the inner core of character, conviction, and discipline that had animated earlier generations. Since these traditions were to some extent invented in reaction to the shortcomings of present society, their analyses and prescriptions frequently overlapped.

This was one reason Savonarola could appeal far beyond his own core. There were hosts of fellow travelers who followed the friar, not out of deep Christian conviction but because they heard in his message some resonances with their own social, political, or religious causes. This is also why Savonarola's movement could challenge some cultural and intellectual developments of the Renaissance period while appearing to fulfill others. No one was more articulate or determined in calling for a truly republican regime. The Savonarolan ranks swelled with true believers, wishful thinkers, and opportunists who thought that they could manipulate the friar to do their bidding and then discard him. The combination of devotion, projection, and strategy made the movement unstoppable.

Yet the Savonarolans' own combination of dogmatism and intransigence in the face of mounting pressure from the papacy and gathering problems inside the city made their rapid collapse inevitable. The fellow travelers soon fell away or even joined the opposition that secured his death by burning in 1498. Ironically, this fiery execution gave the movement its continuing life. Those Snivelers who may eventually have become disillusioned by failed prophecies, contradictory politics, and accumulating tensions could now wail over Savonarola as a martyr cut down by powerful and illegitimate forces before his time. They were determined to fulfill his promise. While Savonarola gets the attention, it is his followers who are far more interesting. They developed extensive underground networks, they worked secretly to achieve their goals, and they sprang into action when opportunities presented themselves unexpectedly in the late 1510s and late 1520s. There were many of them, and some were prepared to risk martyrdom. This goes beyond devotion to a person—they believed in a more egalitarian holy republic that promised a new life for all in a community of virtue. It was a tremendously empowering vision that inspired reformers of all stripes across Europe in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and among its most powerful elements was the active role it promised for ordinary laypeople, for women, and even for children.

Charity was a cornerstone of their ideal holy republic, and under Savonarola, the *piagnoni* moved to take over some of Florence's key confraternities for helping the poor. Members typically adopted only simple worship activities in place of earlier elaborate civic-religious rituals, taxed themselves heavily to generate funds, and developed broad administrations that involved many people in running charitable activities.

After Savonarola's death, the *piagnoni* continued public education and public charity through these same charitable confraternities, which became a powerfully effective underground network, particularly when the Medici returned to power in 1512, aiming to suppress their domestic enemies. With the second Medici collapse and the reemergence of a republic in 1527, the *piagnoni* were ready to assume power. Their sudden revival that year, armed with clear plans for concrete political and charitable action, can only be explained by the fact that a healthy *piagnone* underground had existed through the 1520s. The confraternities and charities were the public face of that busy secret network. Yet moving from the underground into public political office posed problems, which only multiplied when papal and Imperial troops besieged Florence in 1529. Differences over strategy pulled the movement apart and alienated many moderate supporters. From the 1530s, these lay moderates gradually abandoned revolutionary rhetoric and action in favor of efforts to build the holy republic on a smaller scale, by immediate action, with a lay focus, and without directly challenging the Medici dukes, whom some even hoped to recruit to the cause.

The Medici in their turn proved more vindictive. Pope Leo X had tried to co-opt the *piagnoni*. His cousin and protégé Clement VII was more punitive when installing as duke Alessandro de' Medici (1511–37), widely thought to be the pope's illegitimate son by a black or mulatto servant and hence tagged *il Moro*, or "the Moor." Duke Alessandro immediately executed twenty-five prominent republican leaders and imprisoned or exiled another two hundred. He stamped out a later revival of prophecies by imprisoning and executing yet more leaders and closing the confraternities. When Cosimo I gained the ducal throne after Alessandro's assassination in 1537, he too immediately closed the confraternities to prevent them from becoming the kind of underground resistance movement that had made the *piagnone* so effective through the 1510s and 1520s.[5]

The fight with the Medici opened rifts in the *piagnone* movement, particularly between laity and clergy. Across Europe clergy began to reconsider their enthusiastic endorsement of the honest layman's wisdom and integrity, particularly when it became apparent that protestant lay reformers were ready to seize churches, close monasteries and convents, and push priests to the margins. More clergy aimed to stake out a role for themselves as the voices of educated Christian reason and sober second thought. There had always been something a little odd in Savonarola's alliance of laity and clergy, since his Dominican Order had never been as lay oriented as the Franciscans, Servites, or even Augustinians. So it was no great surprise when, by the 1530s, the Florentine Dominican friars began to claim a larger role as the ones who would animate, direct, and ultimately control the *piagnoni*. Their efforts were directed not just to laity but also to female clergy, that is, nuns. Yet Savonarola's female disciples were self-assured activists who frequently clashed with the Dominican friars over the organization and direction of their charitable and devotional activities.[6]

How can we track the Savonarolan dimension of the Compagnia della Pietà? A key early guide to the Savonarolan movement in Florence is a list of those who petitioned Pope Alexander VI in 1497 to lift his excommunication of the friar. Comparing company membership with this list, we find that the families of more than 40 percent of the Pietà appear on the pro-Savonarola petition.[7] This is a rough sign of possible connections. Families don't always sing in harmony, least of all in a place as fractious as Florence, so we also need to look carefully at individuals. This means retracing the details of particular individuals' family backgrounds, marital connections, political careers, and social and religious activities. It requires scanning lists of officeholders, re-creating family trees, tracking down marriage contracts, and scanning local chronicles, tax and census records, and perhaps court records. Piece by piece we recreate the strands of personal and social connections that constituted individuals' networks.

This painstaking work allowed Florentine historian Rosalia Manno Tolu to show that the Compagnia della Pietà was not just a collection of Savonarolan do-gooders. These were the wives, daughters, sisters, and widows of top-ranking and active *piagnone* men, and they had suffered directly or indirectly for their convictions. Co-founder Marietta Gondi, who remained active until her death in 1580, was the widow of Federico Gondi, a prominent member of the last Republic and firm Medici enemy who died in exile in 1536. They had no children, and Marietta gave her life to the Pietà from its opening, and then all her remaining fortune when she died in 1580. Ginevra Bartolini's husband Lionardo fled the city at the collapse of the Republic in 1530 and was condemned to death for his role in protecting Pieruccio de' Poveri, a charismatic *piagnone* leader who had helped reorganize Florentine poor relief. Lucrezia Girolami was the widow of that Republic's last *gonfaloniere*, Raffaello Girolami, and her daughter Cosa Antinori also joined the Pietà. Maria Strozzi's husband Lorenzo Ridolfi had opposed the arrival of Duke Alessandro in 1530 and had fought against Cosimo I at the critical Battle of Montemurlo in 1537 where his opponents tried unsuccessfully to unseat him before he could establish himself. Even closer to home, through the years when the Pietà was being established, Maria Strozzi's own brother Piero was an officer in the pay of the French and the Sienese fighting against Cosimo I's troops in the war to take over Siena. Apparently, her bastard half-brother Paolo was as well. Marietta Strozzi was the daughter of Carlo Strozzi, who had conceived Paolo, "the Little Priest," with his servant girl Agnoletta, and who then ordered his heirs to provide them with a house in Florence and a house and some lands in the countryside. When Paolo was declared a rebel by Cosimo's government, presumably for following his half-brother Piero into armed opposition, the family saw this as an attempt to disinherit the Little Priest and his mother.[8]

Some Pietà women had more mixed political connections. There were three Medici widows in the membership: Andreiuola, Francesca, and Maddalena.[9] Ginevra Sacchetti Capponi's father, Niccolò Sacchetti, had signed the 1497 petition defending Savonarola, and her brother-in-law Niccolò Capponi had been a prominent official in the last Republic. Yet another brother-in-law, Luigi Guicciardini, husband of her sister Isabella, was a close ally of the Medici and served in important political posts under Cosimo I. Maddalena Gondi's late husband Pagnozzo Ridolfi had started out as a follower of Savonarola but cut his *piagnone* connections after 1530 and served the Medici instead; they trusted him enough to give him some political offices. Monaldesca Monaldeschi Baglioni was the widow of the mercenary Malatesta who had been in charge of the Republic's armies through the siege of 1529–30; after many months, Malatesta had seen the writing on the battered city walls and negotiated a surrender with the imperial forces. Yet other family links suggest that the informal networks among patrician families allowed for a degree of coordination in charitable institutions. Maria da Diacetto was the wife of Piero di Bartolomeo Capponi, who had joined Malatesta Baglioni in the surrender, and the sister of Dionigio da Diacetto, who from 1561 to 1574 was one of the captains of the Magistracy of the Bigallo that ultimately controlled the Pietà's first home in the S. Maria dell'Umiltà hospital. Another sister was the stepmother of the famous nun St. Catherine de' Ricci.[10] The list goes on and on.

These were women who had experienced the realities of governance and the costs of rebellion through their fathers, husbands, and brothers. Many had paid a high price for their *piagnone* allegiance. But was there anything in the way that they ran the home that was characteristically or distinctly “Savonarolan”? Rosalia Monnu Tolu thinks that despite their Savonarolan family roots, it’s anachronistic to portray them as politically active. A common interest in charity had submerged the earlier tensions between the *piagnoni* and the Medici. Yet even if there was no overt political goal, those roots nourished a distinct approach to religion, charity, and life. We saw earlier that when the *piagnoni* took over charitable confraternities, they typically simplified the religious life, broadened the administration, and ploughed a lot of their own money into the work. Does this also characterize financing, administration, and spiritual care in the Compagnia della Pietà?

One reason the account of the Pietà’s origins in *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* rings false is because it treats the home as an entirely conventional operation launched on little more than some pious clerics’ prayers. We need to go back and read it more critically in the light of other archival records that paint a different picture. The Pietà was distinctive—and distinctly Savonarolan. The doors opened in December 1554, but by that point, the Margherita Borromei and Marietta Gondi already had been at work for months knocking on doors, twisting arms, and raising pledges: 149 by Christmas 1554, 270 after the first year, 320 by 1558, and eventually 385.[11] All the pledges came from women. No other homes had this kind of financing, none this kind of membership. Pledges were small, but there were enough of them to open the doors.[12]

Savonarola had argued in favor of precisely this kind of financing. In his holy republicanism, corrupt wolves circled around hospitals and charitable shelters aiming to defraud and steal. The only way to keep them at bay was to depend on small pledges rather than large donations or endowments. The amount raised might not cover all costs, but the gap could be met by setting the recipients of charity to work—they had to be as directly engaged as their benefactors. Girls like those in the Pietà wards would then learn a skill, prepare for life, and become contributing members of the broader home community: even the Renaissance raised the specter of the “welfare queen” and offered charity as “workfare” rather than “welfare.”

The women of the Compagnia della Pietà also ran their home differently. Here we need to be alert to the clues provided by what is missing. There were no rule books or statutes. These typically laid out who could be involved and how the charitable shelter would be run by its team of officials, each of whose duties was spelled out in detail. Most homes run by men didn't open until statutes were in place. The Pietà women never quite got around to this while in Borgo Ognissanti. Once a woman offered a pledge, she became a member of the Compagnia della Pietà and could then take a role in the home's activities.[13] Working without statutes was how groups of widowed *pinzochere* ran their little shelters. It was often how women generally ran even larger charitable institutions.[14] The Pietà had no sign of the small specialized administrative teams that ran other homes like S. Maria delle Vergine or S. Niccolò, although it did employ a male bookkeeper to track finances. The women of the Compagnia della Pietà gathered in an informal council of prioresses, called together by Marietta Gondi, and took decisions collectively. This included decisions on what girls would get in the home. While there could potentially be many women at the table, the Pietà process was more streamlined than elsewhere. The prioresses accepted a girl to an interview and then decided immediately whether she could enter. By contrast, homes run by men set out complicated processes in their statutes: interviews to check a girl's background and reputation; physical examinations to confirm her virginity and attractiveness; repeated votes of the membership to move her case forward step by step. It could take months to get into a home run by men—and just hours to get into the Pietà. The prioresses recorded only the barest of details about the applicant in their *Libro Segreto*, or Secret Book, perhaps to give her a fresh start. Terse entries in a secret book meant that on entering the Pietà the girl could shut the door on her past.[15]

When it came to spiritual care, the Pietà women walked a tightrope. Their own collective spiritual life has left no traces. The Compagnia della Pietà does not turn up in chronicles or on lists of the confraternities whose members celebrated saints' days with neighborhood festivities or took a public role. At least some women collected spiritual and meditative literature because they passed their own books on to the girls. They may even have started Bible studies in the home, something associated with Protestants and the Catholic reformers known as *spirituali* than with conservative Catholics.[16] Beyond that, they seem to have embraced Savonarola's vision without initially extending their arms to Savonarola's

Dominican successors. Dominican friars had been the personal confessors for many *piagnone* individuals and groups, but this was not initially the case at the Pietà.

The best way for lay religious and charitable institutions to avoid falling under the control of a single order, like the Dominicans, or a single house, like S. Maria Novella or S. Marco, was to choose chaplains from different places in turn and to appoint them for short terms only. Savonarola had warned widows against getting too close to a single cleric —even pious ones could be tempted by sex or power and drag the widows down with them.[17] The Pietà women certainly followed that advice, drawing from laity and clergy, from both regulars and seculars, and from the first, second, and third orders. While at Borgo Ognissanti, the Compagnia della Pietà hired teachers for the girls from an unnamed neighborhood confraternity, from the Carmelite sisters of S. Maria degli Angeli, and possibly from the Franciscan friars at Ognissanti. Their earliest chaplains were the secular priest Antonio Cattani and the Capuchin friar Girolamo Finugi da Pistoia, and they later hired Dominicans, Camaldolese, and even Jesuits, who were no lovers of Savonarola. Yet many of these were identified in some way or other with the Savonarolan movement. Savonarola had followers across the spectrum of religious orders, so the women of the Compagnia della Pietà could maintain that critical connection while avoiding control by any single order by simply drawing their chaplains from different orders. Other confraternities and charities did this frequently, though not as consistently as the Pietà. It was a practice that the Dominicans were less open to than other religious orders and that Florentine Dominicans particularly resisted. It's telling that when the Dominican friars began *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* some decades later, they downplayed the orders and achievements of these other clerics and gave the impression that the Pietà had always been in the care of heroic Dominicans.[18]

From what we can reconstruct, this was not just a group of women with general family links to the Savonarolan movement. This was a group that shaped their home's finances, administration, and spiritual care differently, and most of the differences could be attributed to Savonarolan ideology, to the methods employed in Savonarolan confraternities and charities, or to the lessons learned in the six decades since the friar's execution. It was run exclusively by women, funded in part by a large membership offering small pledges and in part by the girls' own labor, and administered informally. The female patrons were deeply religious yet cautious to avoid too great a dependence on any particular cleric or religious order. Locating the home in the middle of Florence's red-light district, accepting girls of dubious reputation who were somewhat older than the average for other conservatories in the city, and keeping their identities secret was equally in keeping with the Savonarolan vision of helping the city's most vulnerable souls. Of course, all of this could also lead Florentines to suspect that the prioresses were pious hypocrites like Grazzini's *pinzochera* Mona Antonia and that their secretive home was a bawdy house.

Then there is the name. The 1561 census takers listed it only as the "Spedale delle Abbandonate in borgo ognissanti," or "the Hospital of the Abandoned girls in Borgo Ognissanti." This was at once blandly descriptive and deeply resonant. As we saw earlier, the same name had been attached to another home less than a decade before. No manuscript record explicitly links these two, but if we look a little closer at the history of both we can find telling connections. Through the 1540s, a widow Lionora Ginori had run a small and informal shelter a few blocks off the Ponte Vecchio in the Oltrarno. It was little more than a household where Ginori lived together with a couple of other widows and, eventually, her two daughters Caterina and Maria. This was a classic *pinzochere*-style community. Ginori sponsored a few abandoned or abused girls at a time, finding dowries for them (sometimes by appealing to Duke Cosimo I) and even arranging their marriages. She began her work around 1541, and the name "Ospedale delle Abbandonate" seems to have emerged about a year later as an informal tag after Florence's new civic shelter for boys, the "Ospedale degli Abbandonati," had opened under the care of the Captains of the Bigallo. Eager to take over Ginori's shelter and make it the nucleus for a larger girls' home that would complement the Abbandonati, the Bigallo Captains started subsidizing Ginori's work with gifts of flour, wine, and mattresses. But Cosimo I was having none of it. After Lionora Ginori died in 1549, he turned a deaf ear both to the suggestions of the Bigallo captains that the shelter come under their wing, and to the pleas of Ginori's daughters and the other widows that they get the funds to keep it going.[19] Duke Cosimo I actually ordered it closed. Why?

Ginori was a prominent *piagnone*. The widows who supported her were her daughters, and most of the abandoned girls whose backgrounds and marriages we can trace, were also *piagnoni*. Duke Cosimo was no fool. He had every reason to suspect that Ginori's shelter was another cell in the *piagnone* underground. When ordering her home closed, he was not turning his back on abandoned girls, as the widows accused him of doing in a letter; he simply decided that care he paid for should be in the hands of his supporters rather than his opponents. This was how the new confraternity of St. Mary of the Virgins got its start, staffed by Medici loyalists and headed by his wife Eleonora's Spanish confessor. That group of men immediately wrote statutes that defined a formal administrative structure and shifted the shelter's focus to take in girls of a somewhat higher social status. The girls moved a short distance to an old hospital on Piazza S. Felice across from the ducal palace. They were not just under the duke's direct care, but quite literally right under his gaze.

The *piagnone* widows who had worked with Ginori and her daughters had every reason to be angry. Duke Cosimo I had snatched their home right out from under them, leaving the poor girls they helped without any shelter. Did they begin planning a comeback immediately? The Casa della Pietà opened within three years, and as we saw, the 1562 census takers gave it the same generic name as had been used for Ginori's shelter.[20] Among those giving pledges were Lionora Ginori's daughters, Caterina and Maria. More of Ginori's former supporters were among those now joining the rapidly growing Compagnia della Pietà and pledging to support a revived Ospedale delle Abbandonate in Borgo Ognissanti.[21] The Pietà's informal structure, broad membership, reliance on pledges, and independence from church and government authorities all could be interpreted as deliberate steps to avoid giving Duke Cosimo the opportunity to shut them down. Ginori's Abbandonate home had become too dependent on Medici funds for its operations and the dowries it gave to girls. That dependence was all the opening that Cosimo had needed to shut it down. In contrast, the new Pietà/Abbandonate was deliberately self-supporting: it took no government subsidies, and it offered few dowries. The subsidies the Cosimo I once channeled to Ginori's Abbandonate now went instead to S. Maria delle Vergine and then to S. Niccolò, which the duke ordered opened little more than a year after the Pietà's emergence. The duke wanted S. Niccolò to serve the same constituency of laboring families that the Pietà assisted, but he located the shelter in a working-class district on the opposite end of town.

Were the Medici and the *piagnoni* waging a subtle battle for the hearts and minds of Florentines? That may be reading too much into the situation, and it certainly risks misreading the power dynamics at work. Cosimo I would have had little difficulty finding a pretext to shut down the Pietà had he wanted to. But when we see the connections lying just under the surface between Lionora Ginori's Abbandonate, Duke Cosimo's S. Maria delle Vergine and S. Niccolò, and the Compagnia della Pietà's Casa della Pietà, it is clear that there was more to the sudden emergence of these shelters in fifteen years than a lively concern for the morals of young, orphaned, and abandoned girls. The homes reflected different visions and emerged in reaction to one another.

Many influential women were involved at the Pietà, and, after having once been bested by Cosimo I, they were determined to avoid repeating the experience. They had a specific group of adolescent girls in mind: lower status, slightly older, possibly shakier reputations, and arguably in greater danger. Cosimo shut these girls out of "his" new homes, which he installed in better parts of Florence. The Pietà women located their new home in the kind of area—part industrial slum and part red light district—where their target group of girls was most likely to congregate. They accepted girls quickly and registered only the barest of details about them in a "Secret Book." They operated without formal statutes and were canny at evading oversight and control by state and church authorities alike. Could they avoid it altogether? The Pietà's first chaplain and its first bookkeeper were also members of Cosimo's confraternity of S. Maria delle Vergine. Both were also out of the picture in less than two years.

From All Saints Neighborhood to the Street of the Almond Tree

We need to remember that the world these women made was temporary at best. There may have been almost four hundred women in the Compagnia della Pietà by the end of the 1550s, but a decade later, only three dozen remained. Around this time, the girls moved out of the red-light slum of Borgo Ognissanti (literally—and ironically—"the neighborhood of All Saints") and to Via del Mandorlo ("Street of the Almond Tree"). After the move, the average age of entering girls dropped, the death rate dropped, and the number of girls marrying out of the home or working as domestic servants also dropped. Statutes were written. Administration became tighter and admissions more formalized. Finances collapsed, and administrators rooted around the old ledgers and notebooks to find blank registers for their daybooks. Once they had left Borgo Ognissanti, former neighbors seemed unwilling to admit that there had been abandoned girls in the Umiltà hospital, let alone 160 of them. The Casa della Pietà that took up residence among the market garden plots of Via del Mandorlo became a far more conventional home. It was frankly closer to Duke Cosimo I's vision than the home that had operated among the whores and wool workers of Borgo Ognissanti. Was this radical change in circumstances connected to a radical change in vision? It's time to look more closely at these changes and the people behind them.

As we peel back this layer and look more closely at *The Chronicles* and ledgers to trace how and why the Pietà changed in the 1560s and 1570s, a strange paradox emerges. It was a Savonarola vision and Savonarolan women that created the Pietà. Yet it was Savonarolan politics and Savonarolan men that ultimately brought their distinctive House of Compassion to an end. The women may have outmaneuvered Cosimo I in the 1550s, but they were outmatched by the joint action of two Sniveler clergy: a charismatic friar and Florence's archbishop. With Cosimo's cooperation, these men turned the women's project into something quite different from what its founders had planned.

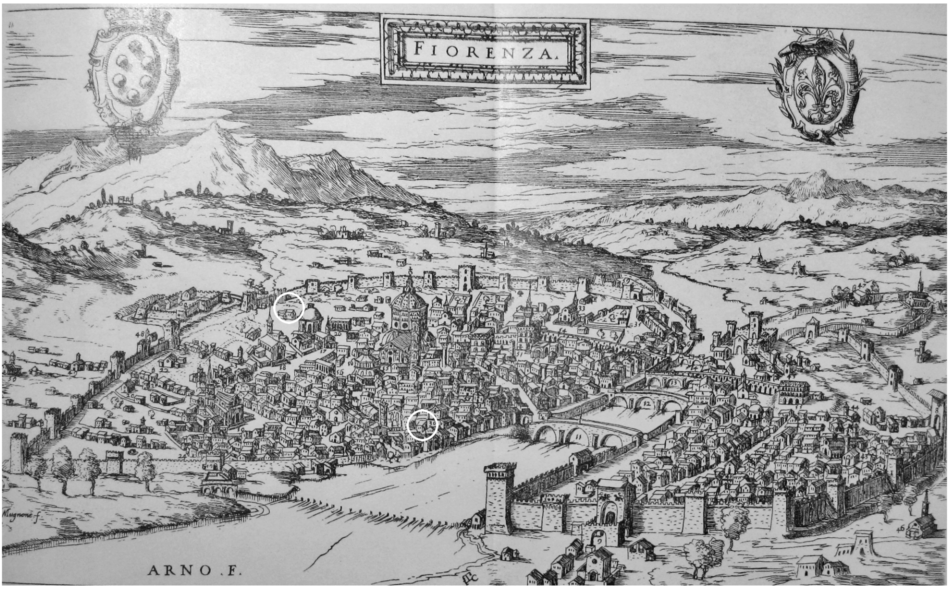
The friar was Alessandro Capocchi of the Dominican house of S. Maria Novella, two or three blocks northeast of the Pietà. Capocchi had been spiritual director of one of the key *piagnone* confraternities, S. Benedetto Bianco, and of the Carmelite convent of S. Maria degli Angeli. He was one of the new-style *piagnone* male clergy who emerged in mid-sixteenth-century Florence, downplaying Savonarola's millenarian prophecies and anti-Medicean republicanism, and promoting the friar as a misunderstood miracle-working proponent of spiritual reform.[22] Capocchi was charismatic, determined, and skilled at overcoming opposition. He had worked hard to persuade his own Dominican mendicant brothers to move S. Maria Novella into a different branch of the Order so that it could join forces with Savonarola's old house of San Marco. To secure the position as the Pietà's chaplain, Capocchi muscled aside the Jesuit cleric who was then serving in that role by accusing him of heresy. The suspicions stuck, the Jesuit was shuffled off to Rome, and the grateful women of the Pietà appointed Capocchi in his place. This episode provides another example of needing to read between the lines. *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* fudges the connection to the Jesuits by describing the disgraced cleric simply as one of the "priests of S. Giovannino," coyly neglecting to add that the Jesuits were in that church.[23]

Capocchi served for a decade (1558–68) and was the moving force behind the changes that reshaped it. Seeing the loose administration of many women working informally together as disorderly, he persuaded them to institute a smaller executive council.[24] The open process by which prioresses accepted girls into the home was tightened up by the addition of sponsors who weeded out unsuitable girls and brought forward for consideration only those they deemed worthy. Early sponsors included women of the Compagnia della Pietà but, in a few decades, expanded to include priests and friars, members of the Medici court, and even the Grand Duchess. Capocchi tossed out the worship books that the women had given to the girls and dismissed the confraternity that had trained them in Christian Doctrine, sending them instead to the Carmelite nuns of S. Maria degli Angeli and enrolling all the girls in the Rosary confraternity that the Dominicans promoted as a guide to devotion. And he began working hard for the move out of Borgo Ognissanti.

The reasons given in *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà* are suspect and suggest that debates had broken out within the Pietà over the home's direction. The old location was supposedly too small—hard to argue with, although Girolamo da Sommaia's donation of a house and garden around the corner had already remedied that. The old Umiltà hospital was supposedly too expensive, although the financial records of both the Pietà and its landlord the Bigallo magistracy fail to turn up any record that the 80 scudi annual rent was ever paid. It was supposedly too unhealthy, both physically and morally, with one letter describing it as a "very pernicious" neighborhood that the girls could not stay in "without the greatest danger," although the *piagnone* had always deliberately brought their charitable work right into the neighborhoods that needed it most.[25] Concerns about morality could work in two ways: in this same period, the Venetians moved their Convertite shelter for former prostitutes and their Pietà-like House of Abandoned Girls (Casa delle Zitelle) out to the remote Giudecca neighborhood. It was moved not only because they thought busier neighborhoods held more temptation for the women and girls but also because the girls were a temptation for men and boys downtown.[26]

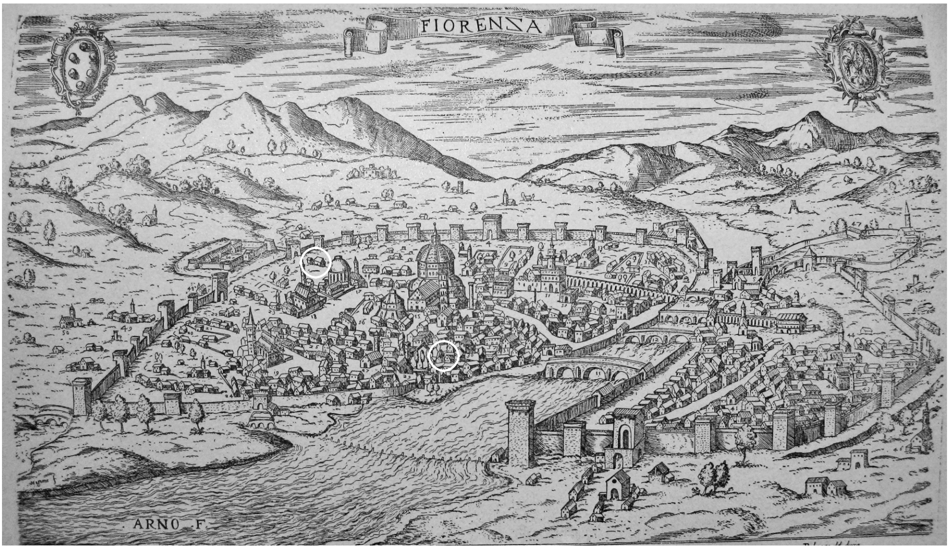
The new site was not just far from that "pernicious" neighborhood. It was far from anything. Via Mandorlo was the farthest you could travel from Borgo Ognissanti and still remain within the city walls. In fact, those towering brick walls loomed over the fields that stretched out behind the girls' new home. Aerial drawings of the time show little but vacant space. In the empty streets of that neighborhood, the Dominicans of Savonarola's old friary S. Marco were carefully gathering their own collection of saints, including the convents of S. Lucia and S. Caterina di Siena. The neighborhood had the densest concentration of convents in the city. So many of them faced on to nearby Via S. Gallo that Florentines referred to it as the *via sacra*, or "holy street." Whatever the internal debates in the Compagnia della Pietà, Capocchi had to lobby skillfully for the move with the ducal court. The Bigallo captains opposed the move, as did the Franciscans of Ognissanti. Most awkwardly, it would be necessary to sell Girolamo da Sommaia's house and garden to generate the funds necessary to buy another property. Yet da Sommaia, perhaps determined to expunge the memory of his son's violent assault on a servant girl in the Ognissanti neighborhood by promoting the Pietà's work there, had prohibited any sale on pain of losing the property altogether. Capocchi's first choice for a new site was another hospital with church and garden attached that fronted on Piazza San Marco, but the duke had his own eye on it and was unwilling to let it go. Capocchi's go-between in his negotiations with the Medici was a well-connected nobleman, Paolo Rosso, who served on the Onestà, whose first wife had been among the earliest members in the Compagnia della Pietà, and who employed Capocchi as his personal confessor.[27] Cavaliere Rosso could not secure the favored site but did convince Cosimo I to override Girolamo da Sommaia's condition, and in December 1563, the Pietà sold the legacy and bought three houses on Via Mandorlo with the funds. These it then began reworking into a new enclosure.[28]

The Pietà girls made the move in November 1568. At the head of their



Giulio Ballino, Florence, 1569. Attillio Mori & Giuseppe Boffito, *Firenze nelle vedute e piante. Studio storico topografico cartografico.* Firenze: Tipgrafia Giuntina, 1926. Location of Casa della Pietà: 1554–1568 (*bottom circle*) and after 1568 (*top circle*).

formal procession marched eleven-year-old Lucia, twelve-year-old Betta, and fourteen-year-old Diamante: they were the newest girls in the home and likely hadn't been at Borgo Ognissanti for more than a few weeks. Another who may have joined them leading the line of about 150 girls was Domenica di Marcho da Firenze, though she was only five, and sick. Domenica was either the last to arrive at Borgo Ognissanti or the first new recruit at Via Mandorlo. It made little difference. She was definitely the first to die at the new site, only two months after the move. As a result, she was also the first to be buried in the new cemetery that had just been consecrated there. Unlike the other girls, she entered without a sponsor, the last beneficiary of the old open-door procedures and a reminder that, in its new quarters, the Pietà would still have to contend with the tragic deaths of young children.[29] The neighbors who would within a couple of years "forget" to mention that the girls had ever been there watched as a long line of very young children and adolescents dressed, no doubt, in



Giacomo Lauro, Fiorenza, ca. 1600. Attillio Mori & Giuseppe Boffito, *Firenze nelle vedute e piante. Studio storico topografico cartografico.* Firenze: Tipgrafia Giuntina, 1926. Location of Casa della Pietà: 1554–1568 (*bottom circle*) and after 1568 (*top circle*).

their best clothing exited the Umiltà hospital, headed over to S. Maria Novella, and then moved north through the center of Florence: past the brothel and baptistery, beyond the family palace that Duke Cosimo I had abandoned, on to San Marco, and then north and east a few blocks to Via Mandorlo.

As the door was closing behind the teenage Pietà girls, the Pietà women were making their own move. From the moment the new quarters had started taking shape in 1563, the Compagnia della Pietà began to collapse. Members failed to renew their pledges, either displeased with the care the girls received, alienated by the changes that Capocchi had already spearheaded, or opposed to the move to Via Mandorlo. With no minute books to reveal the internal tensions, we do not know what lay behind the collapse. Yet curiously, as the girls were about to file out for their long walk across town, the remaining women of the Pietà were voting to dismiss Alessandro Capocchi. In the archives, a volume of sketchy notes about events, gifts, and decisions indicates that the women of the executive council that Capocchi had put in place had discussed their energetic Dominican's tenure three days before the procession and had voted to replace him. It is the only time a Pietà administrative record notes the appointment of a chaplain, and the only time that a vote is recorded: 8 to 1.

The women now bypassed the Dominicans entirely and hired Francesco Franceschini, a monk of the Camaldolese order, although once again *The Chronicles* obscure this turn to another religious order by identifying him only as secular priest.[30] Changing priests could, of course, simply be the consequence of changing to a location much farther away from Capocchi's home base of S. Maria Novella. Franceschini's Camaldolese house of S. Maria degli Angeli was just a few minutes walk to the south. Yet there was more to this than simple practicality. Even *The Chronicles* point to tensions between Capocchi and the women, claiming that some women of *mali voli* (bad will) in the Compagnia della Pietà opposed the friar and adding mysteriously that "he left the Governing Council of those Abbandonate because he was not able to realize one of his intentions for them."[31]

What intentions? We can only speculate on Capocchi's goals and on whether they constituted the last straw for equally determined Pietà *piagnone* women like Marietta Gondi and Lucrezia Ricasoli. What might we read between the lines? The administrative changes, relocation, and alterations to the girls' religious exercises had been gradually turning the Pietà into something resembling a convent, but each move had been approved by the women. Were these changes the cause of collapsing membership or a desperate response to it? When Cosimo I facilitated the move to Via Mandorlo, was it payback to the *piagnone* women who had so publicly defied him by establishing a new Abbandonate to replace the one he had suppressed and reshaped? Certainly, the logical outcome of the changes Capocchi had promoted was to turn the Pietà into a convent in which a governing confraternity like the Compagnia della Pietà would no longer be needed. This could be what finally galvanized the opposition to individual changes in the past. Appointing the Camaldolese monk Franceschini might stall conversion of the conservatory into a convent, although it might also make the Dominicans nervous because the Camaldolese already had a convent on a nearby street.[32] But if stopping the drift to convent status was the Pietà women's new strategy, it was about to be undone by the second Savonarolan cleric who now entered the story: Florence's Archbishop Antonio Altoviti.

Altoviti had been archbishop since 1548, but Cosimo I had barred him from Florence. The Altoviti were prominent *piagnoni*, and Antonio's father, Biondo, had been an open opponent of Medici rule, to the point of supporting the assassination of Duke Alessandro I "il Moro" in 1537. Paul III's appointment of Altoviti as archbishop in 1548 was a deliberate slap in Cosimo I's face, and the duke responded by refusing to allow the archbishop to enter Tuscany. He also confiscated church revenues. The deadlock lasted for almost twenty years, ending only when Cosimo backed down in order to gain the new title of Grand Duke of Tuscany from the pope. Without close supervision of Florence's religious life by a resident archbishop, the Pietà women had enjoyed great freedom in how they directed their girls' spiritual lives, possibly extending as far as providing some with Bibles. After some negotiations and compromises, Cosimo I finally allowed Altoviti to enter the diocese in May 1567.

There could be no more dramatic public symbol that refashioned moderate Savonarolism had reached its peace with the Medici. Archbishop Altoviti immediately began an aggressive program of reform following the models and dictates of the Council of Trent, which he had attended while cooling his heels outside Florence over the previous decades. He surveyed all the city's churches and hospitals between April 1568 and October 1569 and held a diocesan synod in 1569 to adopt formally the Tridentine decrees. These included regulations tightening up order and discipline in women's religious communities. A wide variety of these communities had emerged across Italy over the previous centuries, some open and others closed, some regulated, and others free. They included many houses of widowed or single women bound together by informal vows and pursuing charitable work beyond the supervisory reach of regular or secular clergy: everything from the young Angela Merici's early forerunners of the Ursuline order to widow Lionora Ginori's Ospedale delle Abbandonate, to hypocrite Mona Antonia's household of *pinzochere* prostitutes.[33]

The Council of Trent aimed to tidy up and regulate this variety and wanted particularly to put people like Mona Antonia out of business by shutting women up in more tightly enclosed houses, either formal convents or informal religious communities. In some places, the goal was quixotic, and a bishop would have to be determined and savvy to overcome opposition from powerful families who didn't want to isolate the daughters they had sent into convents. Wealthy families needed convents to take in the daughters they couldn't afford to dower, and a daughter would be more willing to forgo marriage and enter a convent if she knew that she could still receive visitors, visit relatives and friends, and participate in the city's cultural and intellectual and social life. However, open doors let in all sorts of problems, and Altoviti was determined to close them and savvy enough to know how. In June 1570, he ordered the women of the Pietà to draw their next chaplain from the Dominican Order, and from San Marco in particular. The Camaldolese Francesco Franceschini disappeared from the scene and the new regime began.[34]

The Dominicans of San Marco were willing to serve as chaplains but extracted a high price that permanently changed the Casa della Pietà. They were determined to exercise tighter control over this home and confraternity as they did over other convents and brotherhoods in Florence. The women of the Compagnia della Pietà had to agree to appoint *only* friars of S. Marco in the future and had to pay a much higher monthly fee for the privilege: double what they had paid the Camaldolese. The San Marco Dominicans always looked on the convents and confraternities gathered under their spiritual care as steady sources of income. But their determination to control the Pietà went far beyond money. The women of the Pietà had to allow San Marco's prior to supervise future elections of the Pietà prioress. They had to turn over one of the three keys to the church, and they had to give the chaplain a freer hand. The new spiritual director, Friar Battista Salvetti, immediately reenrolled the girls in the Confraternity of the Rosary and began moving them closer to the Dominican Order with indulgences and spiritual benefits. Capocchi's administrative innovations were written up into formal statutes that were adopted that same year—another Tridentine requirement.[35]

Statutes often mix tones of frustration and determination—some things must never happen again, and other things must absolutely happen from now on. The result can be a unreal, and few people, much less teenage girls, could live by their stern rules for long. Here, too, reading between the lines of the statutes imposed on the Pietà in 1570 can round out our picture of what life for the girls had been like at Ognissanti, even if only from the long lists of newly forbidden things.[36]

What's striking is just how open the Pietà's door had been. Girls had been able to meet their parents or brothers or sisters at the door and spend long hours chatting together and even taking meals together. If a girl's relative fell sick, she could go back home and visit and nurse them for a few weeks. Girls who had married came back to visit with old friends in the home, and some female visitors even slept overnight. All sorts of men came in and out of the house: porters bringing big purchases into the kitchens or furniture into the dormitories, silk and wool brokers coming into the workrooms to discuss their business and see the work the girls were doing, and carpenters and handymen carrying out repairs around the house. The girls connected easily with life on the street through open windows and doors because that was still *their* life. They sang the songs of the street, read the books that were popular, and dressed like other girls because everyone assumed that the Pietà was a temporary shelter, not a prison or a convent. They might need protection, but they weren't to be cut off from day-to-day life in Florence.

Does this mean that things got bawdy in the ways that Grazzini's *pinzochera* Mona Antonia would find familiar? Quite possibly, given the neighborhood. The 1570 statutes explicitly ended each of these activities and a few more besides. No silk or wool brokers could visit on holidays when their shops were closed. In fact, no men could come in at any time or for any reason, except friars or officials and even they had to have two female chaperones. Suspicions hung over even their life together as adolescent girls. The dormitory lamps should stay lit all-night, and girls could no longer sleep more than one to a bed. No female visitors could stay overnight: this could mean a bawd, but it could also mean an aunt who came in to console a six-year-old girl who had been pulled out of her family's household and dropped into an institutional dormitory. Girls couldn't take baths together or wash one another's hair. Clothes were a big concern: girls now had to wear simple uniform dresses and button them right up to the neck, "and not show those things that should be covered."[37]

The statutes slammed the Pietà's open door shut. The climate around all female enclosures was certainly becoming more sober and puritanical in these years. More than this, the new statutes were more suited for a convent than for a temporary shelter for teenage girls. The statutes assume the Pietà is a convent and contain severe punishments that would have made even a nun's parents think twice. Whether Capocchi wrote them or someone else, the statutes were obsessed with sex: a literate girl was not allowed to read romantic *novelle*, since these would put ideas in her head. When working, she could not sing love songs, as this would give a wrong impression to anyone passing by in the street. If she sang suggestive songs, she could be whipped in front of the others or even made to kiss the feet of every other girl in the home. If she joked about sex or marriage, she had to spend mealtime on her knees, holding up two distaffs loaded with raw hemp. If she blasphemed against God or the saints, she had to stay on her knees through Mass. If, in frustration, she called on the devil, she had to spend a mealtime standing in the dining hall with only a piece of metal in her mouth. If she gossiped, she was given a sign to wear on her back during the meal. If she talked about escaping this new prison, all her hair would be cut off. If she managed to escape and was captured and forced to return, she would be put in the home's new prison with a shaved head. Cutting hair or shaving the head was pointedly cruel because loose flowing hair was one sign of a single girl and a feature that made her attractive to a young man (married women and nuns cut their hair or wrapped it out of sight in a headdress). Cutting off a teenage girl's hair was akin to cutting off her dreams of an adult life outside the Pietà.[38]

These statutes were meant to break the will of ordinary teenage girls who dreamed of sex, marriage, and life. The rules aimed to reshape them into nuns whose thoughts did not stray over the walls and into the streets. Could they be imposed on girls already in the home? Possibly not, but the San Marco Dominican friars were looking ahead. They were biding their time. Some girls left or died, and options ran out for others. Bigger changes came in the 1580s as, one by one, the founding group of women passed from the scene. After twenty six years as Mother Prioress, Marietta Gondi died in 1580. Lucrezia Ricasoli, the last of the founding group, followed her as Mother Prioress until her own death in 1586. Resident Prioress Mona Alessandra, the widow of Girolamo the woodworker, died in 1583 after having spent twenty-nine years overseeing the day-to-day life of the girls. These three women had given the Pietà its character, had overseen its move, and had cooperated with and then replaced Capocchi. If any abortifacients had been used at the Pietà, they had known of it and consented to it. The year of Ricasoli's death, a Flemish friar, Gherardo Fiammingo, arrived as the chaplain. He pushed for changes that were as dramatic as Capocchi's. While they may have been delivered in a far more low-key and less confrontational way, it was Friar Gherardo who moved decisively to turn the Pietà into a Third Order Dominican convent. He vested the first eighteen girls as tertiaries on 25 March 1595, the feast of the Annunciation and Florence's New Year's Day.[39]

These were long-term changes, but the move from Borgo Ognissanti to Via Mandorlo also had more immediate results for finances, organization, administration, and medical care. Some difficult years now followed, and the girls' relations with the outside world changed, sometimes for reasons that went beyond the new statutes. Now distant from the contacts, donors, and volunteers built up over fifteen years in Borgo Ognissanti, their home was weakened financially.[40] The worst year was 1574–75, when Florence was assaulted by a serious plague. With donations collapsing and costs skyrocketing, the Pietà couldn't even raise half the funds it needed to feed its girls. It slashed purchases of food, clothing, and wood, sent more girls out as servants, and scrounged for work and alms in order to end the following year with a small surplus. The economies forced on the Pietà this year took deeper root, and its annual budget was seriously cut back.[41]

Turning girls out in time of trouble was not to an option for long. While at Borgo Ognissanti, one in seven girls had left the shelter to become servants in private homes. Despite the threat of sexual assault and the fact that many returned to the Pietà, this was the first step out of the shelter and into a "normal" family life. This ended at Via Mandorlo. One girl, thirteen-year-old Camilla di Andrea, left in 1569. No more were let go until almost twenty were jettisoned during the plague of the mid-1570s when the Pietà was desperately trying to balance its accounts. A handful trickled out after that, all of them to work with textile weavers, with the last leaving around 1584.[42] After that, domestic service was simply no longer an option for the girls. They remained locked inside, living by statutes that turned the Pièta into both a factory and a convent.

You could not have chosen a better site in Florence for a silk factory. With large purpose-built rooms opening on to a bright open courtyard and garden, the new Pietà looked ever more like the spacious workshop that Jan van Straet depicted in the engravings that he produced during this time. Porters could bring large chests of cocoons or bales of mulberry leaves through the S. Gallo gate three blocks away without threading their way through the maze of narrow streets downtown to Ognissanti. The new statutes capitalized on the site, projecting an advanced and efficient division of labor with separate rooms under separate supervisors for silk, wool, and linen work. The girls definitely would work: a girl who failed to meet her quota was to be refused food at mealtime, and anytime she did a poor job or ruined a piece of cloth, it would be hung around her neck as she stood hungrily watching the others eat.[43]

But statutes are frequently overly ambitious. In the last years at Borgo Ognissanti and the first at Via Mandorlo, the girls' textile work had generated a steady 40 percent of the Pietà's income. It soon began to swing wildly, ranging from less than 20 percent to more than 60 percent from one year to the next, and throwing all accounting into disarray. First, the income from reeling, spinning, and weaving more than doubled. Anyone who had promoted the move to expand the workspace and increase income could rightly feel vindicated. However, by the crisis years of 1574–75, income from textile work had collapsed across the board and had sank far below the level in pre-move years. A recovery of spinning and weaving brought it close to the earlier peak a year later, but this proved unsustainable. Weaving and reeling dropped by half, and even the old standby, spinning, declined sharply. Weaving picked up slightly the next year (1578), but the other areas continued their decline. The move had put the girls farther away from the shops and brokers who generated piecework, and the statutes kept them from having daily contact and personal relationships they had earlier enjoyed with these textile workers. Ironically, while silk work's demands for space and light may have been a significant driver for the move to Via Mandorlo, it was silk reeling that registered the biggest fall.[44]

The girls had traditionally raised a good amount from their alms-gathering, which connected them closely to their crowded neighborhood. Shopkeepers, textile workers, churchgoers, and prostitutes around Borgo Ognissanti had given small coins, food, and goods totaling almost 60 percent of the Pietà's income before the move—far more even than the pledges that the women of the Compagnia della Pietà generated in their best years. The new statutes laid out such strict guidelines for the girls' alms-gathering that it is hard to believe they could have been followed; the rules give a rich picture of what the girls had been doing earlier by what they strenuously forbid. There was no longer to be any talking together, no chatting to girls or boys out gathering for other orphanages, no gossiping with former girls who had married and set up their own households, no conversation with men at all.

Easy back-and-forth chatter at market stalls and on the streets had bonded the girls to their neighbors in Ognissanti, and restricting communication may explain why alms income plummeted after the move. It dropped immediately by half and fell by half again before the end of the 1570s when it was no more than a fifth of income.[45] Of course, there were few neighbors to start with in the straight, empty streets around Via Mandorlo, so the girls' inability to chat with them may be why few would give money. And empty or not, the streets around Via Mandorlo may not have seen much of the Pietà girls for long. Receipts from the girls' trips around shops and churches with their alms boxes disappear altogether from the ledgers by the end of the decade, either due to changes in accounting procedures or to the decision to get them off the streets altogether. In ten short years, the Pietà moved from being an alms-supported open shelter in a desperate neighborhood, to being a closed workhouse in a remote and underpopulated part of town. The Council of Trent's goals for convent life were being imposed on this group of orphaned and abandoned adolescents who had entered with no intention of becoming nuns.

Or had they? As more girls stayed longer in the home, there were fewer spaces available for the kinds of needy girls who had slipped in the door at the beginning. There were also fewer spaces for the kinds of girls who didn't want to button their dresses right up to their necks. The doorway in was no longer quite so open, and the way out was closing fast. Even before the move, from June 1566, girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena would have needed a sponsor to push the door open. This was precisely the kind of advance vetting that male homes practiced routinely and that the Pietà women had, till then, avoided. Some sponsors were simply members of the Compagnia della Pietà like Marietta Gondi, who brought in a single girl (eight-year-old Maria di Francesco da Crespino, who lived only eighteen months longer) or Camilla, widow of Antonio Cardi, who brought in three.

Other sponsors had different connections to the home: Maddalena Costanza was the granddaughter of Girolamo da Sommaia, although she is unlikely to have had her father's horrific crime in mind when sponsoring a child into a home once dedicated entirely to vulnerable girls like the servant he assaulted. But what subtle changes would result when over a third of the sponsors were men? Or when one in eight was a cleric? Or when more came from the Medici court, including the ambassador of Ferrara and even Grand Duchess Christine of Lorraine herself?[46] The grand duchess's gentle pressure brought Susannah di Gabriello Francese into the Pietà, and the name suggests that Susannah was the daughter, almost certainly illegitimate, of one of Christine's French courtiers. This was the emerging pattern for other Florentine conservatories: courtiers, clerics, and civil servants were starting to find these lay shelters to be cheap and convenient places to dump illegitimate girls—their own or those of good and influential families. Girls too good to be set out on the street, but not good enough to warrant the financial investment that would get them either a real convent or a real husband. Any financial consideration that the sponsor offered would fall far short of a dowry.

Florence could only afford to allow this change at the Casa della Pietà because the range of homes for abandoned girls in the city had expanded significantly by the later 1580s and 1590s. Two new homes were now gathering girls who might otherwise have headed to Via Mandorlo, and this allowed the Pietà to turn its back on those desperate girls it once had served. Grand Duke Francesco I opened a home dedicated to St. Catherine for Florence's poorest girls in 1591 when a new wave of famine pushed Florentine laboring families once again to the brink. At around the same time, he helped two civic welfare agencies dedicated to serving better-off families as they maneuvered to get a new conservatory, the Casa della Carità (House of Charity), to turn itself into a boarding house that would, for a fee, shelter the girls of needy families. This allowed both agencies to stop sending girls to the Pietà. Florence was still a small city where people and places connected and influenced one another. It was this shifting landscape of care in the city as much as anything happening inside the Pietà's walls or governing confraternity that gave Friar Gherardo the freedom to start turning the shelter into a convent.[47]

Taking all these changes into account, the girls entering the Pietà after its move were likely from better-off families and far healthier. They likely had fewer expectations about their ability to leave the home for work, visits, or marriage. The site certainly had more space, light, and air, even if these amenities were designed to make their work easier than their days brighter. The question, “What was killing the girls of the Pietà?” becomes almost moot. If girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena, died in the home now, it was only after many years living like nuns, isolated from the contagious diseases and regular childbirth that brought many laywomen to an early grave. Medical care changed radically. From at least 1571, the friars of S. Marco took over the infirmary from the Pietà’s medica Margherita and put it under the control of their own friar, Antonio. The rest of the old medical staff was also dismissed. The two doctors on retainer at Borgo Ognissanti, one for bleeding and another for general help, were replaced with one doctor.[48] A new apothecary provided medicines. With the old medical staff swept away and the manuscript containing medical recipes now used by the bookkeeper to record purchases of zucchini, mutton, and oil, care changed radically. Medica Margherita had spent more than 130 lire in 1566 and over 220 in 1567 on medications and the ingredients for her recipes. Friar Antonio the new *Infermiere* spent 4 lire in 1571 and the same again in 1572, limiting himself—and the girls—to inexpensive sugary syrups and a tonic water called *acqua bora*.[49]

By the end of the 1570s, perhaps in the confusion over the transition, the Pietà’s administrative recordkeeping collapsed. The inventory in the Florentine State Archive points to an alarming situation that unfolded once Marietta Gondi was no longer the Mother Prioress. Once again, the most striking clue is what’s missing. The daybooks (*Giornali*) run from before 1565 to 1579 but disappear from 1579 to 1605; the account books of income and expense (*Entrate/Uscite*) run from 1557 to 1577 but are gone from 1577 to 1609; the records of debtors and creditors (*Debitori/Creditori*) run from 1557 to 1579 but are not extant from 1579 to 1604. These missing books weren’t stolen. Accounts from the 1580s and 1590s exist, although only as random sets of loose-leaf sheets haphazardly bundled together.[50] Flood, fire, theft, or disposal of records could have opened up gaps over the centuries. But faced with the progressive deterioration of all recordkeeping, the parallel gaps in three separate and important sets of financial registers, and the presence of sporadic and unorganized loose-leaf records, it is hard to avoid seeing a deeper crisis in the home. Faulty recordkeeping was not due to staff changes; in fact, a single bookkeeper Giovanni Bencini, was in charge from 1565 through 1601. He kept clear and systematic records for the Pietà while it was still at Borgo Ognissanti. From mid-1570s, Bencini started scrambling through older volumes madly looking for any ledger that had enough blank pages to record some accounts. A few years later, he seems to have thrown up his hands and given up entirely. The resulting gap in the records matches almost precisely the period from the deaths of the founding group of women to the death of Friar Gherardo. Only with Gherardo's successor do we once again find systematic daybooks, income/expense ledgers, and debit/credit records.[51]

The financial ledgers, matriculation records, and statutes demonstrate that the Casa della Pietà had changed radically after the move to Via Mandorlo. What of the Compagnia della Pietà? With membership down to a handful of women, administrative changes were inevitable. Mother Prioress and the resident prioress now served shorter terms, while the spiritual directors remained longer—the reverse of earlier practice. Male friars were starting to replace laywomen as the home's real directors.

The most striking sign comes in the language used in the documents to describe relationships between the girls and those helping them. Here it is less a matter of reading between the lines than reading literally what the lines say. The early ledgers and account books specifically and consistently referred to the women collectively and are headed with some variation of "this book is of the women and girls of the Pietà" (*questo libro e delle donne e fanciulle della pieta*). The letters they sent to Duke Cosimo I regarding property transactions were not signed by Marietta Gondi or an executive but by "The women who govern the abandoned girls of Borgo Ogni Santi" (*Le donne che governano l'abandonate di B. Ogni Santi*).[52] The early admission records for girls and for new members of the Compagnia always stated that they had been interviewed and accepted by the "mother prioresses" (*madre priore*) in the plural. This language emphasized the close personal and maternal connection that women of the Compagnia had with the girls and the egalitarian relations within their own group.

This language shifted in *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*. Neither Friar Giovan Battista Bracchesi nor Sister Caterina, its first two authors, used the term "Mother Prioress" for the women of the Compagnia della Pietà.[53] This title was reserved for Brigida Pesilli, who had come to the Pietà at age eighteen and had become resident prioress after Mona Alessandra died. Brigida's notes gave Friar Giovan Battista and Sister Caterina their information on the early years, and she would prove as critical to the Pietà's refashioning as Friar Gherardo. Sister Caterina described the small core of women who now comprised the Compagnia della Pietà as the "Lady Governesses" (*Signore Governatrice*), headed by a laywoman called either the "General Prioress" (*Priora Generale*) or, even more tellingly, the "Outside Prioress" (*Priora di Fuori*).[54] And fathers? The 1570 statutes ordered the girls to consider the Dominican chaplain to be their true father and to call him by this name.

Sister Caterina's language foreshadowed the tone that later authors of the Dominican chronicle would emphasize even more strongly. These authors, nuns and friars alike, wrote often about the close emotional relations in the home between the Dominican *padri spirituali* and the girls, but said nothing positive about the relations between the women of the Compagnia della Pietà and the girls of the Pietà. Even *The Chronicles*' organization betrays this bias, right down to its telling silences. It is subdivided into chapters, organized according to the length of time that particular priests spent with the home and seldom describes anything that the girls do apart from prayer, spiritual exercises, and religious training. As such, it resembles convent necrologies, which refract nuns' complex lives through the singular prism of death.[55] It says nothing about the girls' textile work or their going out as domestic servants. In *The Chronicles*, the girls shed tears of grief when a beloved spiritual father died and tears of rage ("hot" tears no less) when the women of the Compagnia della Pietà interfered with one of these friars. But they apparently had no tears for themselves. No word of girls such as soldier Neghrante's daughter Maria and Friar Billi's daughter Maddalena, who had been among the first girls to live at Borgo Ognissanti and who died within a year. Or for five-year-old Domenica di Marcho da Firenze who could lead the procession to Via Mandorlo in November 1568 and be dead two months later. *The Chronicles* say nothing about the many deaths that made the Pietà the most unsafe place in Florence for a girl to live.

By the early seventeenth century, the hundreds of women who had comprised the Compagnia della Pietà in its early years had shrunk even beyond the nine-member executive of Capocchi's time to a panel of six. They oversaw the changes that shut the doors and windows of the Casa della Pietà against the world and gradually turned the community inside into a convent. The Compagnia della Pietà had appointed Mona Alessandra and Brigida, but their successors would be elected from among the body of women who had lived in the Pietà for the longest period, since this was how nuns in convents selected their prioresses. From 1623, the older girls could no longer gather alms in the streets. From 1624, all instruction in reading and writing was stopped. Cutting out their schooling may explain why no Pietà girls carried on *The Chronicles* after Sister Caterina. Regardless, it rendered their classroom (*scrittorio*) useless, so in that same year, it was turned into a storehouse for grain. The girls had always prepared their dough in the home and then taken it out to a baker's oven, but this link to the outside world was also severed by constructing an oven on site. In 1624, the Pietà started a new matriculation list, the Libro Nuovo, and registered 106 women, a third fewer than the numbers that had crowded into the Ognissanti dormitories. The youngest was eight, the oldest seventy-nine. A third of the women had been living in the home thirty years earlier when Friar Gherardo vested the first tertiaries. By 1634, the administrative records referred to the institution as the Monastero delle Fanciulle or the Venerabil Collegio delle Fanciulle della Pietà. The Casa della Pietà had opened eight decades earlier as a temporary shelter meant to protect adolescent girls through a vulnerable period of their lives. It had now completed its metamorphosis into a Third Order convent that girls would enter at a younger age and that most would never leave until death.[56]

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We have looked far ahead but need to turn back and ask how this later history of the Pietà may shape our understanding of what was going on in the Pietà in the 1550s and 1560s, when many girls were dying at a young age and when medical care may have included the use of abortifacients. As we list the later changes, it is hard not to see them as oriented directly at ending those early practices that had made the Pietà so distinctive in its early years. Girls began entering at younger ages, and at the nomination of sponsors, many of them male, and most of them upper class. Their lives were now carried out more exclusively within the walls of the home, with none going out either as domestic servants or as alms-gatherers. All the medical staff had been replaced, the *Ricettario* had been put aside, and the amount spent on medications had plummeted. Strict statutes set out a disciplined work regime and severely punished girls whose thoughts and language strayed to an emotional and physical life outside the walls. They wore uniforms buttoned up to the neck. The girls no longer learned their prayers, songs, and doctrines from various authorities chosen by the Compagnia della Pietà, much less from reading the Bible, but were under the exclusive spiritual care of the Dominicans of S. Marco. It was a narrowing care that would lead some and eventually all of them to put on nuns' habits. The Compagnia della Pietà had mostly evaporated. Only a small executive group remained of the hundreds of members who had pledged their money and given time, books, and employment.

All of this suggests that the change of location was not simply moving out of a dangerous neighborhood of prostitutes and workshops and into a safe neighborhood of market gardens and orchards. The Pietà at Via Mandorlo was a repudiation of the Pietà at Borgo Ognissanti. The great irony is that what had made these women and their home distinctive was the effort to embody key tenets of the traditional Savonarolan creed, and what turned the whole enterprise first into a conventional shelter and then into an enclosed convent were some key players in the refashioned moderate Savonarolan movement. Some of the tensions between laity and clergy and men and women that had run through the Savonarolan movement in the 1530s still reverberated decades later. The male clergy who led the movement in the 1560s and 1570s brought an end to what had been one of the most distinctive experiments in helping one of the most marginalized groups in Florentine society.

Of course, after all of this examination of context, we still are no closer to knowing whether the abortifacient remedies were ever actually used as such. What we do know, however, is that after the move to Via Mandorlo the most likely reasons for their possible use had stopped, the mostly likely recipients were kept out of the home, and the most likely dispensers of the remedies themselves had been eased out of their work.

Had the Pietà's medica administered abortifacients to the girls at Borgo Ognissanti? Of course, that is only half the question. And it may be a moot question. Regardless of whether they were used or not through the 1550s and 1560s, it's unlikely that abortifacients would kill girls if they were used according to contemporary guidelines. A few might sicken and a handful might even die if the dose was wildly wrong, but these remedies could never generate the steady procession of shrouded corpses brought out the door at Ognissanti. We simply can't point to abortifacients as the killer of the girls of the Pietà. What then might explain it?

When the research seemed stalled at this point, I discussed the Pietà's distinctive characteristics and its convoluted history with a colleague whose background was in medical science. Her current research interest lies in discovering how dedicated Catholics ran an underground religion —in her case, it is not Savonarolans under the Medici, but Catholic Recusants in England under Queen Elizabeth I. I laid out the contexts of *piagnoni*, politics, prostitution, domestic service, and gender but confessed my continuing bafflement over the Pietà death rate. “Oh,” she replied immediately, “but that would be syphilis.”

CHAPTER SIX

Virgin Girls and Venereal Disease

What should I speak of young children, where divers have been greatly vexed with this disease, and some of them but a year old, some of them 4 or 5, some 6 or 7 years old. Among which sort, I cured one wench being 12 years of age in the year of our Lord 1567, who was greatly infected with this disease in many parts of her body, having thereon painful nodes, aposthemes, and ulcers, with corruptions of bones and yet no sign in the suspected parts. Neither was she of strength to have committed any such act. But I rather take it that she as divers other are, was infected by the corrupt milk of an infected nurse, for that such milk is engendered of an infected blood.

—William Clowes, *De morbo gallico* (1567)

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Fingering syphilis as the killer assumes a lot. It assumes that syphilis in the sixteenth century followed roughly the same course from its emergence as a plague in the late fifteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, when penicillin finally brought it under control. It assumes that the plague which emerged in the Renaissance actually was syphilis. At the time, people called it only the "pox," attaching as an adjective whatever nation or group they most hated or feared at the time: Neapolitan pox, French pox, Italian pox. It assumes that this pox was indeed new to Europe and not simply the mutation of some preexisting disease. Medical historians once made all these assumptions confidently. They no longer do.

This is only the beginning of the complications. No contemporary manuscript names this disease—as either syphilis or the pox—in relation to the girls of the Pietà. No source suggests it and no song, story, sermon, or satire even hints at it. No records point clearly to individual girls with symptoms of it. My colleague's suggestion stemmed from what she knew of the epidemiology of syphilis before penicillin, and in particular of how the symptoms of congenital syphilis presented themselves: onset before puberty followed by a steady deterioration that often culminated in an early death. Even if we assume for sake of argument that the pox was indeed syphilis and that the sickness and symptoms were roughly similar over five hundred years, we have little to connect it to the Pietà beyond a few medical recipes and a pattern of mortality. When girls like Margherita, Maria, and Maddalena died, nothing more than a "+" marked their spot in the *Libro Segreto*. There was no description of symptoms or course of treatment.

As with contraception, the silence of sources and complications of context put this hypothesis about the cause of the Pietà's high death rate far out on a very shaky limb. Yet as with contraception, identifying syphilis as the cause may have also meant less to contemporaries like the women of the Pietà than it does to us. That is, they may in their own minds have been doing nothing more than taking care of sick girls without connecting the sickness to the pox, or syphilis. And even if they did make that connection, their understanding of the disease and of how it spread may have made them less alarmed and judgmental about it. Not all cultures immediately associated syphilis with immorality or sin. As with contraception, we need to start by reconstructing the horizon as it looked to Renaissance Italians, who were simply trying to understand what had hit them once the pox began spreading. Only then can we consider how that horizon might look like to us.

Approaching the Pox

It went by many names: Italians called it the French pox, Latinized as *morbus gallicus*, and the Spanish, Germans, and English were happy to adopt this insult to their traditional enemy. Some French reciprocated by calling it the Neapolitan disease, since their soldiers had first picked it up when besieging that city in 1494. In 1527, the French doctor Jacques de Béthencourt offered the term *morbus venereus*, or the "disease of Venus" (hence, venereal disease), to highlight sexual transmission. Yet not everyone thought sex was the only vector. In those same years, the Italian physician and poet Girolamo Fracastoro wrote a poem in which a shepherd named Syphilis is struck with the disease through an act of impiety. Why this name should stick is a bit of a mystery, yet it recalls other names that were fundamentally metaphors, most of all the "disease of St. Job," after the long-suffering Old Testament prophet who was plagued with the same kind of aching pains and itchy sores familiar to Renaissance victims of the new disease.[1]

Or not so new. De Béthencourt and Fracastoro thought it a new disease, but other authorities such as the Italian physician Niccolo Leoniceno thought it an old disease familiar to Hippocrates. Yet others, like the Genoese surgeon Giovanni di Vigo, were uncommitted. Di Vigo believed it was new, yet he acknowledged that the Roman emperor Augustus had suffered similar symptoms, and so it might in fact be a version of *elephantiasis* known to the ancients. The English doctor Thomas Gale, royal surgeon to Elizabeth I, threw up his hands and proposed calling it the "chameleon disease," or *chameleontiasis*, because it was so difficult to pin down. In one sense, it didn't really matter: drawing names from nationalist insults, mythical metaphors, poetic inventions, biblical models, or sheer perplexity underscores the extent to which the disease was fundamentally puzzling for Renaissance Europeans.[2]

Whether new or old, when seeking to diagnose it, doctors needed to work with the causes and terms most familiar to them from classical and biblical authorities, and they rounded up the usual suspects. It came from the stars and the perilous conjunction of Saturn and Mars (or Jupiter) together with two eclipses. It arose from badly mixed humors, or corruption of the air, or cannibalism. It was a thunderbolt of judgment from God, fed up with human promiscuity. But regardless of its origins in the stars, humors, air, diet, or God, the primary vector was almost always a woman. Pietro Rositinio, writing in the 1550s, singled out a beautiful prostitute working among the French soldiers camped around Naples. Her beauty drew many men to her, but a corruption of her humors had created a putrid uterine sore that infected all who had sex with her and that they then passed on to other whores, who then passed it on to other men in a spiraling vortex of infection.[3]

Even those who thought that intercourse with an infected man or woman was the most likely way to contract the pox left the way open to other forms of transmission that had less to do with what you did than where you were and who you associated with. Running sores were such a common symptom that many medical authorities believed that it was possible to pick up the disease by coming in contact with the highly contagious pus that leaked from them. Wearing infected clothes or sleeping in infected bed sheets was patently dangerous, but because few people had many changes of clothes and many still slept two, three, or four to a bed in sheets that were infrequently washed, it was almost unavoidable. When dining, most people still shared cups, plates, and utensils and used fingers more than cutlery, so eating and drinking with an infected person could result in infection. Using the same toilet as a sufferer or sharing tools or other items could expose individuals to contagious pus. Breathing in bad air that had been contaminated by a sufferer could transmit the disease: One Spanish authority thought that this was the best way of explaining how celibate priests contracted the disease. Their charity work among the poor and destitute rendered them vulnerable, and coming down with the pox had nothing to do with breaking a vow of chastity.[4]

Among children, the greatest dangers were to nursing infants, who could pick up the infection as they suckled. Some authorities blamed the milk, others the physical contact with infected breasts. Others thought that a baby could also pick up the infection at the moment of birth, since infected women usually had sores ringing their vagina. Sores on the lips of infected adults made their kisses particularly dangerous for babies or children, but how could they possibly defend themselves? Given the many ways one might get the pox, having it was not always seen as a shameful sign of moral lapse. For some, and children in particular, it was no more shameful than catching a cold or fever. You were to be pitied but not blamed.[5]

Once caught, what were its symptoms? Giovanni di Vigo gave one of the clearest descriptions of the French pox in a book on surgery that he wrote in 1514 while he was a doctor to Pope Julius II. At first, dark pustules appeared on the genitals; the skin around the pustules turned hard as a callus. These then spread around the body to the head, neck, arms, legs, and beyond. After six weeks, sharp pains developed in the shoulders, arms, thighs, and hips. More hard tumors attacked the bones months later, bringing pain that was terrible by day and excruciating by night, and leaving lesions on both the bones and surrounding membranes. Over a year after infection, painful abscesses the size of chestnuts and filled with a thick and putrid pus developed where bodily tissue was rotting away. Skin eruptions continued, leaving raw scabies-like patches in some parts of the body and knob-like swellings that were hard as a bone in others. The eyes became inflamed and sore, making sight difficult. A sharp stinging pain like gout attacked the feet and sciatic pains crippled the hips and thighs. Headaches were constant. The intense pains around the joints diffused into a general arthritis-like soreness over the whole body against which all traditional pain remedies were useless.

> What is the action of the remedies [of Galen and Avicenna] upon the pain of the French disease? It is nothing, absolutely nothing. We have convinced ourselves of that by experience, and we are completely convinced of the absolute impotence of all the anodyne oils, all the calming salves, all of the consoling unctions, baths of water, fumigations, etc. On the contrary, what a striking relief follows the simple unction to which a small dose of mercury communicates a virtue practically marvelous.[6]

Giovanni di Vigo had seen this spreading epidemic firsthand, and he complained that the number and varieties of hard tumors, abscesses, and lesions defied description, let alone classification according to the systems passed down from ancient medical authorities. Yet he did his best, and most sixteenth-century authorities followed Vigo's terminology. An *aposteme* (or pustule) was a hard and burning inflammation caused by an excess of the phlegmatic humor. Vigo used the term to describe irregular skin growths. Because apostemes were caused by a corruption and imbalance of humors, these had to be purged. Some surgeons cauterized them with a hot iron. Vigo preferred to "mollify"—that is ripen and soften—the aposteme, then dissolve the corrupt matter and restore healthy tissue. Vigo describes a broad range of apostemes according to their size, their firmness, their color, their location, and what they would develop into as diseases run their course or as they were left untreated. During the course of a disease, apostemes could worsen into various kinds of ulcers that ate away more vigorously at healthy tissue. Fistulas were one type of ulcer that left small openings in the skin but spread out as they worked deeper in the body, leaving a casing of hard flesh. Fistulas grew particularly well in the jaw, the belly, and the joints, and the softer the flesh they grew in, the more small openings they would create.[7] Other ulcers were contagious, and these Vigo called *scrofules*. These were hard and painful abscesses that appeared in large numbers on the genitals, the neck, the underarms, and the breasts.

Vigo's complaint about the multitude of sores and symptoms defying categorization by classical systems was critical because it was these systems of Galen and Hippocrates that gave Renaissance physicians their starting point. A tumor or abscess caused by cold humors needed treatment distinct from one caused by hot humors because treatment worked in part by balancing out opposite qualities through plants, minerals, and liquids that were themselves hot or cold, dry or humid. Only trial and error would show whether and how the traditional pharmacopeia could move from symptoms to causes. If the disease was indeed new, doctors might also need to devise novel remedies using ingredients outside that pharmacopoeia, and for this they were guided by their patients' symptoms. Regardless of whether it was new or old, regardless of whether stars, humors, or God's anger had caused the disease, or whether sex, nursing, or bad air had infected them, sufferers knew two things for sure. The sharpest pains came from inside the body and the worst physical effects—running sores and knobby swellings—appeared on the skin. Early cures addressed each distinctly, though they were not mutually exclusive. Some aimed to drive out the inner poison through sweating cures that involved shutting the patient up in a hot room while he or she drank infusions to provoke a fever-like burning that would drive the toxins out through the pores. Other treatments involved burning or cauterizing the sores or spreading ointments over the patient's body. Ointments softened the hard sore ("mollifying"), isolating and purging the pus-filled ones ("suppurating") and aiming to restore flesh that had rotted away ("mundifying," or "incarnating").

Both approaches might involve relatively new and expensive agents. Those aiming to sweat out the poison used, among other sudorifics, an infusion prepared with the bark, or wood, of the guaiacum tree, a South American tree chosen in part on the principle that God planted cures where He planted diseases. Since some thought that the pox had originated in the Americas, this principle was logical; it also proved profitable to the Augsburg banking family of the Fuggers, which secured a monopoly on the trade and so vigorously promoted the cure. Remedies applied to the skin worked with mercury, which, as Vigo noted, produced marvelous effects: "I have often seen, for my part, after a single week of treatment by mercurial unction practiced upon the ailment, the pains of the French disease disappear entirely, the ulcerations heal, and eruptions disappear and the skin clear of all its spots."[8]

The drawback was that both remedies were expensive and hence available to a limited number of people. These might choose private care, particularly if they were wealthy enough to have a mercury cure. Or they might enter one of the hospitals for the pox that were emerging across Italy from the early sixteenth century. Florence's SS. Trinità degli Incurabili, which opened in 1521, had admirable success with the sweating cure. Like many such places, it operated only in the warmer months from February to October when designated rooms could be stoked to a high temperature, and it forbade any patients from leaving during the length of their cure, which could take months. Poor Florentines entered with two referrals: one from the Trinità's doctor attesting to their need and the other from their parish priest attesting to their poverty. Men and women were eligible for the cure and were treated in separate quarters by the resident staff.[9] Children generally did not get into the Trinità at this time, and no Pietà girl secured a referral. And no mercury or guaiacum appears in the Pietà's *Ricettario*.

What did appear in the girls' *Ricettario* were ingredients and recipes that addressed precisely the symptoms that tormented sufferers of the French pox. Although they might prefer the contemporary magic bullet of mercury, medical authors across sixteenth-century Europe nonetheless recommended many of these ingredients and often these particular recipes. There was only one recipe in the *Ricettario* that might be a sudorific, but many of the unguents, ointments, and plasters aimed to heal skin ulcers by removing the unhealthy matter and restoring the tissue and skin.

In the antidotary that accompanied his 1514 treatise, Giovanni di Vigo discusses in turn many of the ingredients that appear in the Pietà *Rictettario*, attempting to categorize each in terms of the humors. The ingredients he uses from the *Ricettario* deal particularly with apostemes and various ulcers. The hard inflammations were filled with the cold and wet phlegmatic humor—essentially pus—and the best remedies would "ripen" (or soften) the swelling, dissolve the corrupt humor within, and regenerate healthy tissue. Rock alum was thought to be hot and dry and so could prevent the cold and wet phlegmatic humor from spreading through the body. The doctor mixed and boiled alum together with plantain water or pomegranate wine to heal hard ulcers.[10] Other ingredients that were effective in "ripening," "scouring," or "digesting" these hard apostemes included bidellio and altea, the sticky substance, similar to mallow, that appears in the two Pietà recipes attributed to Mesue. Linseed, ammoniac, and opopanace were all hot, dry, and effective in softening cold apostemes.[11] Pitch did not usually soften, but it also appears in ointments used on cold ulcers, while fenugreek would indeed soften and "ripen" cold ulcers. With soft ulcers, the patient also needed something that would draw out the poisonous pus and then dry out the wound and encourage the return of healthy flesh. Aristolochia, which was hot and dry, did precisely this, as did pine resin. Without giving properties, Vigo also recommends adding litharge to ointments for hot ulcers.[12]

Some decades later, in the very years when the Pietà may have been using its *Ricettario*, Thomas Gale published *Certaine Workes of Chirurgerie* (1563) in London. His book is particularly interesting as it contains some of the same recipes found in the volume produced by the Florentine Guild of Doctors and Apothecaries, which had in turn served as the source for the Pietà's remedies. Gale's transcriptions are, like the Pietà's *Ricettario*, almost verbatim, but he expands on some by offering information on what the recipes were good for. Gale also includes an antidotary where he groups the various ingredients according to their properties. Medicines that "drawe and attracte" (due to their "hote temperature and subtyle partes") morbific matter in the body include ammoniac, opopanace, and galbanum.[13] Those that can soften and suppurate hard ulcers and apostemes include altea, ammoniac, bdellio, fenugreek, galbanum, linseed, opopanace, pitch, resins, and wax. Those that help the development of scar tissue after an ulcer has been purged include alum, aristolochia, bdellio, myrrh, and frankincense, while those that are "incarnative," helping healthy tissue grow back in the purged sore, include aristolochia, frankincense, and pitch.[14]

Giovanni di Vigo remained the most authoritative source for sixteenth-century surgeons until the translation and spread of works by the French surgeon Ambroise Paré. Yet Paré largely follows Vigo and Gale on points related to the pox while offering an explanation that clarifies the underlying process. Medicines that, by virtue of their heat, "open pores, attenuate the humours, dissipate and discuss by evaporating the unprofitable matter," include ammoniac, aristolochia, bdellio, galbanum, opopanax, myrrh, black pitch, and turpentine.[15] Ammoniac, fenugreek, galbanum, linseed, pitch, and wax are all suppurative; that is, they shut the pores, sealing off the ulcer and preventing "transpiration," and then they turn the corrupted matter into a pus that can be drawn out. Paré notes altea, fenugreek, and linseed as useful for softening hard sores, and alum, ammoniac, aristolochia, galbanum, myrrh, and turpentine as useful for cleaning ulcers. Paré mentions four types of remedies: (1) infusions, (2) unguents, (3) plasters, and (4) fumigation. While he emphasizes mercury and guaiacum, he also uses turpentine to invoke sweats. Unguents and plasters cause excretions of the virulent humors by provoking diarrhea, urination, and flux of the belly, but most of all by salivation and ulcers that break out in the mouth. This in turn requires patients under treatment to gargle different tonic waters to flush the putrid humors out of their mouth. The most effective of these mouthwashes were barley water and infusions with plantain and pomegranate.[16]

Beyond simple ingredients, these authors and others employed a number of the same recipes as those found in the Pietà's *Ricettario*. The second recipe, identified in the *Ricettario* as the *unguent of Gian di Vigo*, appears in Vigo's own text as the Egyptian unguent (*ungentum egyptiacum*). Vigo recommends it as particularly good against phlegm-filled hard apostemes; "malign, corrosive, rotten, and hollow ulcers"; and scales. Gale and Paré both agree, with the latter offering a vivid description of its action: "It opens and relaxes the skin, and draws forth the matter shut up under it, and is caustic in that it bites, corrodes, putrifies, burns and consumes the aposteme." Two contemporary authorities, Pietro Rositinio, author of the *Treatise on the French Disease* (1556), and Niccolo Massa, author of *The Book of the French Disease* (1566), also recommend the Egyptian unguent specifically for sores arising from the pox, although both note that it works far more effectively when mercury is added.[17] The *Ricettario's* third recipe is similar and appears in both Vigo and Gale.[18]

Its fourth recipe, the *unguento appostolorum da Vicenna*, comes directly from Avicenna's *Canon* where it is recommended for fistulas and scrofules.[19] The ointment appears in many medical texts, and Renaissance doctors commonly used it to "mundify" ulcers, particularly those that are dangerous, putrid, and malignant. Gale describes it as having "greate force agaynste woundes and ulcers whyche are harde to be cured; also for fistulas."[20] Once again, both Rositinio and Massa single it out as an effective remedy for the ulcers and apostemes of the French disease, this time without mercury.[21]

The seventh recipe, the *unguento basilicon magiore magistrale*, also appears in Avicenna's *Canon* as a treatment for ulcers.[22] Vigo includes the recipe as a treatment for ulcers, fistulas, and scrofules, while Gale notes that it is effective for "incarnating fleshe." Paré recommends it for suppurating ulcers—that is, isolating them and turning the corrupt humor into a pus that can be removed. Rositinio does not mention it, but Massa recommends it specifically for the scabies contracted through the French pox.[23]

Recipes eight and eleven are plasters attributed to Mesue, and they indeed appear in his work where they are recommended for softening hard ulcers and apostemes.[24] Vigo recommends them as particularly good plasters for scrofules on women's breasts, though they are also useful elsewhere on the body. Gale includes both and writes that each is "good agaynst scyrhous of the Lyuer, Splene, Stomacke, and other partes, it mollifieth all hardnesse" and should also be used for "inflammations and tumours." Paré also recommends this as a suppurative, and Massa prescribes it specifically for the scabies and sores of the *mal francese*, as does the Bologna medical professor Antonio Francanzano in *The French Disease* (1563).[25]

Six of the *Ricettario*'s fifteen recipes treat apostemes, ulcers, scabies, and scrofules. All are symptoms that sixteenth-century medical authorities associated with the French disease, though of course they could have other origins. Girolamo Mercuriale, author of an early pediatric text *Of Children's Diseases* (1583), took scrofules as the vulgar name for *struma*, a problem that he commonly found in children (although later writers linked this directly to congenital syphilis).[26] The medical authorities who linked these symptoms to the pox also prescribed some of these same recipes, sometimes adding mercury.

What about the other recipes? The sixth recipe is for sore eyes. Certainly, the girls would have developed eye strain from unreeling cocoons for hours each day, but sore eyes and loss of vision were also characteristic symptoms of the French disease. The tenth recipe is for ringworm, the highly contagious scalp disease that attacked children in particular and bedeviled institutions where children were crowded in large numbers and slept close together. Yet Paré and Vigo also specifically noted that sufferers of the French disease contracted a similar scalp disease, which they called "scales" and for which they prescribed a similar remedy.[27]

Of remaining recipes, the first, attributed to Mesue, is based on vinegar and copper acetate that were commonly used to treat ulcerous wounds. Thomas Gale clarifies that the fifth, an unguent made with slaked lime, was good against burns. The twelfth was an unguent that mixed rose oil, sometimes used as a laxative, and elder bark, which was commonly used as a sudorific and diuretic. The thirteenth was an unguent mixing ivy leaves and berries, which were commonly used against inflammations and headaches, and later became more common in treating sufferers of syphilis.[28] The final two were for plasters that mixed various flours. Although Paré used plasters in his cures, these contain none of the ingredients found in the pox recipes.

These fifteen recipes are not unusual, and Renaissance doctors used them for a variety of purposes. Yet whoever chose this handful of recipes from the almost 550 recipes in Florence's 1550 *El Ricettario*, chose many that addressed the symptoms of the French pox, as these are described and treated in the mid-sixteenth century by a range of doctors. This is the common thread running through an otherwise random selection of salves, ointments, plasters, and unguents. At least one has ingredients that would later find common use as pain relievers for syphilitics. Only two seem to have no connection to the French disease.

Looking beyond the recipes, the Pietà's records also show purchases of infusions like barley water and tonics like plantain water that patients undergoing a cure gargled in order to clear the poisonous humors out of their mouths.

Of course, this circumstantial evidence proves nothing. The recipes of the *Ricettario* had various mundane uses. None of the *Ricettario*'s recipes uses either mercury or guaiacum, which would be far more conclusive proof that the women of the Pietà were consciously treating the French pox—although Paré for one thought that infants and children should not be exposed to too much mercury and recommended turpentine instead.[29] The absence of either of the two most popular contemporary cures may mean that the Pietà could not afford mercury or guaiacum. It may mean that the girls did not have the disease. Or it may mean that the women of the Pietà simply did not recognize the disease—they did not connect the French disease with the girls and so made do with treating the symptoms of some strange illness that they could not identify.

But could that illness actually have been killing the girls of the Pietà?

The View from All Saints

Adolescent girls who acquired the French disease directly through intercourse would have the symptoms described above: hard sores all over the body, particularly in the genitals, the neck, and the limbs. They would suffer severe headaches and joint pain so extreme that it would cause them to cry out in pain at night. Their hair might fall out as a ringworm-like infection spread over the scalp and left open running sores on other parts of their body.

Yet children could also acquire the disease indirectly from infected parents. Not the transmission by chamber pots and sheets that doctors from Vigo to Rositinio to Pare feared but transmission in the womb. By the time that the Pietà opened, the plague of the French pox was into its third generation. Some of the symptoms had already started to moderate, as Paré recognized. Yet the number of infected men and women continued to grow, and these adults had children. Many authorities wrote of children acquiring the pox from sores on their nurses' breasts or on their parents' lips. Even these cases of infantile pox could present slightly different symptoms from those found in adults: William Clowes, the first English authority to describe it in detail, claimed that while the characteristic sores spread around most of the body, they were not found in the genital areas—the first place a doctor looked when diagnosing an adult.[30]

Congenital transmission of the French pox from mother to child in the womb was a greater problem and almost inevitable. Yet no one recognized it at the time. This is not surprising, since here too the symptoms were likely somewhat different. This is certainly the case when comparing acquired and congenital syphilis, and in the absence of any clear contemporary diagnoses, we need to reach over to that venereal disease —certainly parallel to and possibly the same as the French pox—to understand the differences between acquired and congenital pox.

Before penicillin, most children with congenital syphilis would die in infancy, anywhere from a few hours to a few months after birth. These babies grew poorly and looked old and wizened. Most of those who survived had physical deformities, particularly in the skull, while others might appear healthy and normal and would only begin showing symptoms from about age six. Although congenital syphilis was not immediately or invariably fatal, serious cases could certainly hasten death. At age six, a girl's joints could begin aching as a result of lesions on her bones, and she could suffer sharp pains in her eyes and dimming vision that might deteriorate till she was blind. Gummy patches would start to develop in the soft tissue of her nose and mouth, and as she moved into adolescence, these could open into perforations in the mouth and even include the collapse of the nose. By this point, she would be complaining of increasing headaches and tremors, which might degenerate into paralysis and deafness. In cases of neurosyphilis, she could become irritable, apathetic, or paranoid, suffer from infantilism, and begin having seizures. In the absence of any treatment, the girl could die in her teens or early twenties.[31]

A sixteenth-century parent, particularly a widow or widower, seeing these symptoms multiply as a girl reached age six, might well abandon her to a home like the Pietà in fear, confusion, or desperation. Likewise, the women who ran the Pietà home may have had little clear idea what they were dealing with. They were taking in sick girls, and those who died within a few months were clearly in an advanced stage of some serious illness. But what was it? Some symptoms were certainly similar to the French pox, and in these cases, the unguents and ointments for sores, the remedies for headaches, and the salves for eyes may have offered relief. Sufferers of the pox also had a decay that consumed the nose and invaded the mouth, and there was little in the *Ricettario* to counteract that. But other symptoms like mental, psychological, and physical deterioration, tremors, sores, paralysis, and deafness could have been attached to other diseases like plague or leprosy. In the diagnostic fog that Vigo complained of, where everything shifted and the classical landmarks were unhelpful, sufferers of congenital syphilis would have been lost.[32]

We do not need to choose one form of transmission over the other. Any girls entering the Pietà infected with the French disease could have picked it up in a variety of ways. Sixty or seventy years after the first European reports of a dreadful new plague, it had spread through a significant part of the population, yet its symptoms were still unclear, and some of its forms were still undiagnosed. Congenital forms of the French disease would certainly be spreading by the 1550s, particularly among populations of migrant laborers. The majority of Pietà girls had fathers who had come from outside Florence and who had likely come into the city as young men in search of work. They were more likely to visit prostitutes and brothels and were more likely to be exposed to the disease and later to pass it on to their wives, who could in turn infect pass it on to their children. Most Pietà girls had only one surviving parent by the time they entered the shelter, usually a widowed father or possibly just a single father. This may have been the case with girls like Maria and Maddalena, daughters of the soldier Neghrante and Friar Billi, respectively, who were among the first girls to enter the Pietà and among the first to die. Neghrante may not have married Maria's mother, and friar Billi certainly could not have married Maddalena's. Both fathers came from social groups that were familiar with the world of brothels and streetwalkers, and both mothers could very well have been prostitutes.

These were the demographics behind the girls of the Pietà. Anything could have killed their mothers: childbirth; accident; an epidemic illness like plague, malaria, fever, or cholera; or a chronic illness like tuberculosis. At least some of the illnesses that had killed the mothers would also have been passed on to these girls in the womb and could be waiting to kill them too. And with illnesses like the French disease, there were enough subtle differences between the congenital and acquired forms that those standing by watching the girl deteriorate would be perplexed and helpless. They might suspect the pox and treat it with some of the same medications, but they would never be quite certain.

Adolescent girls in Renaissance Florence could also acquire the pox directly in a number of ways. If not by bed sheets or chamber pots, then certainly as an infant nursing from an infected mother or wet nurse. Doctors pointed to this as the single most common source of infantile pox, and it is not hard to reconstruct the context. Some may have nursed with women who had the pox. Girls entering the Pietà at Borgo Ognissanti had been born in the late 1540s and the 1550s, when the pressures of famine and economic collapse pushed many parents to join single mothers in abandoning their newborns to the Innocenti foundling home a few blocks north of the Florence cathedral. Hundreds of babies flooded into the Innocenti—between 20 percent and 40 percent of all births in these years—and this skewed the economics of wet-nursing across the city of Florence. Nursing was already relatively well paid, and the steady demand from women of prosperous mercantile and professional families meant that poorer Florentine women who had just given birth sent their own infants to a cheaper wet nurse in order to take in the child of a wealthier family at a higher rate. Cheap wet nurses included women far out in the countryside, women who nursed two or three babies at a time, and women who had given birth so long before that their milk was now starting to dry up. These were precisely the cheaper women that the Innocenti also sought out to feed its foundlings, and when desperate times allowed these women to charge more, the foundling home had to move even farther down the scale and recruit nurses among women who were sick, prostitutes, and sometimes even infected.[33]

The Pietà girls were born in precisely these desperate years, and given the high demand for wet nurses, some may have ended up with cheap nurses who had the pox. Is it plausible that a family would leave its baby with a poxy nurse? Ambroise Paré thought so:

> A certain very good citizen of this city of Paris granted to his wife, being a very chaste woman, that should she nurse her own child of which she was lately delivered, she could also have a nurse in the house to ease of her some part of the labour. By ill hap, the nurse they took was troubled with this disease, wherefore she presently infected the child, the child the mother, the mother her husband, and he two of his children who frequently accompanied him at bed and board, being ignorant of that malignity with which he was inwardly tainted. In the mean while, the mother when she observed that her nursing child did not improve, but cried almost perpetually, she asked my counsel to tell her the cause of the disease. It was not hard to be done, for the whole body of the baby was full of venereal scabs and pustules, the hired nurse's and the mother's nipples were eaten in with virulent ulcers, also the father's and the two other children's bodies. The one was three, the other four years old, [and both] were troubled with similar pustules and scabs. I told them that they all had the *Lues venerea*, which originated in malignant contagion from the hired nurse. I had them in cure, and by God's help healed them all except the suckling child, who died in the cure. But the hired nurse was soundly lashed in the prison and should have been whipped through all the streets of the city, but that the magistrate had a care to preserve the reputation of the unfortunate family.[34]

Modern readers might wonder whether the Parisian father was quite so innocent, but that is beside the point here. When authors like Paré and

Clowes wrote texts singling out the infected wet nurse as the most common vector for infantile pox, they were addressing their warnings to readers who were prosperous and literate, and they drew vivid examples from these readers' social peer groups and from the working classes. If we take their assessment and advice at face value, then at least some parents took on a pox-infected nurse without adequately checking on her health.

Most babies infected by their nurses would, like the Parisian child, die in infancy. Therefore, it is unlikely that many of the Pietà girls dying in their teens would have suffered from a pox that they contracted as babies from mothers or wet nurses. Their doctors, reading Paré, might well think that an older girl picked it up indirectly from some nonsexual contact like the older Parisian children who were caught up innocently in the contagion that had entered the worthy citizen's household from the wet nurse's breast and then swept through the entire family. We, on the other hand, might want to look more closely at the household and the worthy citizen himself when trying to understand how an adolescent girl might acquire the pox.

Any young teenage girl like Margherita, Maria, or Maddalena could contract the French disease directly through sex. We have already seen that Renaissance adolescent girls, particularly those from poorer or marginalized families, had more opportunities to be sexually active than we might think or than they might have wished. Servant girls were commonly assaulted, particularly when they came from families that had fractured or broken apart. Some were frightened victims while others were willing partners looking for pleasure or a possibly a spouse. Other girls were the daughters of prostitutes and may have already entered into the trade themselves since their youth was a valuable commodity and their virginity was a lucrative prize. Other girls were assaulted in their own homes by fathers or uncles, brothers or brothers-in-law.

Some of these girls were assaulted before puberty. Was there any reason beyond dominance or pederasty that a man might seek out a six-year-old girl as his sexual partner? We need to go both far ahead and far back for hints. A few Renaissance authors hinted at a particular "cure" for venereal disease that has lurked under the surface for centuries and that shot back into public view in the wake of the modern AIDS epidemic: the virgin cure. There were men infected with venereal disease who believed that sex with a virgin would cure them. In her pure virginity, the seven- or eight-year-old girl absorbed whatever toxic poisons had infected the man and so rendered him clean and healthy. This conviction has led to an epidemic of child rape across parts of developing world in the modern era, driven sometimes by local men and sometimes by sex tourists who have the money and mobility to test the cure. Did Renaissance men believe in the virgin cure? Did they act on it?[35]

This is perhaps the hardest hypothesis to test because once again there is little direct evidence for it. Certainly, none of the medical texts by Vigo, Paré, Clowes, Rositinio, or others mention it. None of the popular plays or songs put it in verse or on the street. Yet some evidence shows that at least some men thought that what one woman had given them another woman could take away. The humanist Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1553) wrote that in Africa those infected with the French pox recovered from it "by sleeping with a Numidian or black Ethiopian woman, without any other medications."[36] Within a few decades, the Paduan physician Ercole Sassonia in his *Most Perfect Treatise on Venereal Disease* (1597) could cite Scaliger as the authority to bolster reports he'd heard about some Italians who were using sex with black women to cure their venereal disease:

> But one needs to inquire into what I have heard experienced by some people in Venice: they claim to have been cured instantly of gonorrhea by having intercourse with a black woman. The experiment is true and it seems to be confirmed by Scaliger . . . according to whom Africans are cured from venereal disease (*lues venerea*) by sleeping with a Numidian or Ethiopian woman. That I know too, even though I would note reports that indeed more men were freed from traditional gonorrhea (*gonorrhaea antiqua*) by sleeping with a virgin spouse; but then the woman becomes infected.[37]

Far-traveling Venetian men could have headed across the water for their cures like modern sex tourists, though Venice also had a significant black population of its own, albeit with far more men than women. Europeans had started exoticizing and sexualizing black Africans almost from the time that they first began to appear in greater numbers in Europe in the fifteenth century. By the sixteenth century, the stereotypes of potent and promiscuous black Africans combined with growing negative prejudices to create a situation in which black women had few work opportunities beyond domestic service and prostitution. Eager pimps and brothel keepers, who were aware of the stereotypes and superstitions, may have been responsible for feeding the myth in ways that increased the appeal of black prostitutes and obscured the distinction between the pox and gonorrhea.[38]

While Scaliger and Sassonia cited race rather than virginity, others made the shift into a more general view of how sex with particular women could heal. The Milanese doctor Giovanni Battista Sitoni devoted a chapter of his treatise on various medical curiosities to the question, "Whether a man suffering from the French disease will be cured of the disease by intercourse with a virgin." He scoffs at the idea and roundly condemns Sassonia for perpetuating it. Yet while he can easily use Galenic science and patients' experience to show that the idea is false, Sitoni does admit that the vulgar masses believe that virginity has healing power for men wracked with syphilis.[39]

Actually, it was not just popular opinion by vulgar masses. Even before Scaliger had written about the "Ethiopian cure," the Spanish humanist Juan Vives wrote of his father-in-law, Bernard Valdaura, forty-six years old and infected with French disease, taking a young and virginal bride. His condition was a surprise to her on their wedding night, and he quickly deteriorated. Doctors thought the stinking and sore-riddled man was close to death, but his wife rejected their advice that she abandon him. Clara Cervent not only nursed and defended Bernard through decades of illness but had eight children with him. All were healthy, and according to Vives, Clara never picked up the pox in twenty years of marriage nor were any of her children infected with it: "[They] were endowed with healthy and clean bodies."

Vives saw Clara as an admirable example of a loyal wife, who sacrificed her own health and wealth for an ailing husband. But how had Bernard seen her during their courtship? At least one other humanist later repeated this story as an example of the virgin cure, even though Clara was not long a virgin and Bernard never cured.[40] Regardless of how or why Vives had written the story, it fed the kinds of popular opinions that were already circulating underground and that may have raised Bernard's hopes when he first saw the virginal Clara. Vives's account might have led other desperate men to attempt the same cure in other ways with servant girls or orphaned nieces. Renaissance humanists, such as Vives, Scaliger, Sassonia, and Sitoni, may have written their stories about men cured by virgins or black women to condemn the superstition. But what would their readers seize on? We have already seen a parallel case with contraceptives and abortifacients. Medieval authors Constantine the African or Arnold of Villanova may have described birth control remedies in their medical compendiums in order to condemn them, but their very denunciations ensured that the knowledge would be preserved and would spread. Accounts of the virgin cure were now spreading more rapidly and to larger audiences through print, including at least one of the leading compendiums of medical knowledge. Condemnation was expected, but it was also superfluous once the "knowledge" was out.[41]

The belief in the "virgin cure" refused to die, though it remains hard to trace through anything other than doctors' fervent dismissals of a destructive popular opinion. Predictably, many of these doctors claimed that the idea was particularly common among those social groups that were already reviled and denigrated. It became part of the stereotype of degeneration. In 1906, Havelock Ellis described the virgin cure as a belief still that men acted on, adding, "In America this belief is frequently held by Italians, Chinese, negroes, etc." Ellis went on to cite Dr. Flora Pollack, of the Johns Hopkins Hospital pharmacy, who claimed that "in Baltimore alone from 800 to 1000 children between the ages of one and fifteen are venereally infected every year. The largest number, she finds, is at the age of six, and the chief cause appears to be, not lust, but superstition."[42] Contemporary Scottish doctors and prosecutors found that many men believed in the virgin cure regardless of class or education (though some claimed the belief was stronger among the "lower orders"), and they blamed it for an increase in assaults on girls. Orphans were particularly vulnerable, and in a quarter of cases, it was a family member who raped them. Once raped and infected, they were seen as both a victim and a danger, and so were typically sent to some institution (an orphanage, conservatory, "Magdalen home," or syphilitics' hospital) to prevent them from spreading the disease to others.[43]

Can we step at all beyond doctors' reports of strange popular superstitions that they had heard on their rounds? A specialist on syphilis in eighteenth-century England, Kevin Siena, has looked at juvenile rape cases in court records from the Old Bailey in London. Siena found that of forty-six London rape trials between 1714 and 1759, where the female assaulted later developed a venereal disease, almost 85 percent involved girls younger than sixteen (39 girls, or 84.7%). The average age of these girls at the time of their assault was 8.9 years. In fact, venereal infection appears in more than 54 percent of rape cases involving children. Siena then looked further to see whether juveniles were ever treated for venereal disease. He found that from 1758 to 1760 London's foundling home treated twenty-eight children in its own infirmary for venereal disease, and of these, twenty-four died. Of an additional sixty children whose symptoms resembled venereal disease and who were treated internally, forty-four died (73.3%). Fourteen had symptoms bad enough, or were of an age old enough to be sent to London's Lock Hospital, the equivalent of Florence's SS. Trinità degli Incurabili. All of them died. Most of these children were girls.[44]

Siena had earlier come across sermons and pamphlets of the time that denounced men for seeking a virgin cure, and he dismissed them. The preachers who produced them were, he thought, expressing alarmist exaggerations to stir up the fears and open up the purses of potential donors to foundling hospitals and orphanages. He now believes that the preachers may have been simply stating the facts and seeking a solution.

Is it possible that one of the threats that the women of Pietà were trying to solve was the rape of prepubescent girls by men seeking a virgin cure? Court and hospital records for sixteenth-century Florence give far less information than those for eighteenth-century London. They certainly show that juvenile rapes happened in Florence, both within and outside the family circle. Beyond that, they do not offer enough information to allow us to track the question, let alone offer the kind of statistical precision that London's eighteenth-century records allow. We have no direct evidence that allows us to state definitively that Pietà girls had the pox, much less that they had been raped as children by men searching for a virgin cure. We are left once again with a suggestive but alarming hypothesis that cannot be proved but that should not be dismissed.

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It's unlikely that the women of the Pietà intended deliberately to start anything as specific as an abortion clinic or a syphilitics' hospital. Yet it is likely that they intended to open a home to shelter adolescent girls who had been rendered more vulnerable by the sexual politics of contemporary Florence. The telegraphic entries in the entry register, the *Libro Segreto*, do not clearly indicate circumstances. How do we read this silence? Some were girls abandoned by widowers who could or would not care for their daughters after the deaths of their wives. Others may have been girls abused as domestic servants, girls with "blocked wombs," or girls suffering a pox they had inherited from diseased parents or acquired directly from direct sexual contact.

The remarkable women of the Compagnia della Pietà knew the sexual politics of Renaissance Florence. They knew the hard realities that girls generally faced and the even harsher situation of girls abandoned by their families. This was what defined their horizon, and this was what they aimed to improve. Given the times, this almost certainly involved girls who had been raped, girls who had contracted the French pox, girls who were pregnant, and girls who were just seriously ill. Teenage girls and younger were admitted quickly and discreetly with unfamiliar illnesses that left them with aching joints, dimming eyesight, tremors, seizures, and paralysis. We cannot assume that the women recognized the full scale of the problem or that they had the resources to offer the girls a cure. The Casa della Pietà was never a pox hospital as such. If it did take in sufferers of venereal disease or other serious illnesses, it was acting more as a hospice for the suffering and dying than as a place of cure. Yet given these women's charitable drive and sheer determination, it served that function for at least a decade and a half in the mid-sixteenth century.

Friction in the Archives

On the 13 of March the marriage alliance between the Duke of Mantua and the Princess Eleonora, daughter of Grand Duke Francesco, was announced. And because they had wondered whether this prince might be impotent, they thought on bad advice to gamble with God. There is in Florence a place for young girls called the Pietà, from which they drew one of the loveliest that there was, and with false hopes and flattery they sent her to Mantua to make a test with that ruler. And once she realized what was up, that poor girl cried great tears. Nonetheless, finding herself pregnant, she was sent back to Florence to give a testimony of her indecent experience. After she had given birth, she was given as a wife to one Giuliano, a roman musician, with a dowry of 3,000 scudi.

—Anon., *Events in Florence from 1557–1590*

Life of Mariotta da Fiorenza
In 1550 she was enrolled in this Conservatory. Daughter of Giovanni Francesco da Fiorenza, and at that time a child of 6 years old, she entered on 17 July of that year. She always demonstrated signs of special virtue, and the Lord exercised her patience by means of two crosses worthy of no little consideration. The first was an infirmity of 40 years continual duration, to which was added 20 years of blindness, to the end that she could more easily contemplate the things of heaven. She died at almost age 90, on 13 August 1633. About her nothing more can be found apart from these brief but considerable notices.

—*The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*

* * *

Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua was barely twenty years old when the storm broke. A carefully constructed marriage alliance between this eldest son and heir of the Duke of Mantua with Margherita Farnese started unraveling days after the wedding. His side whispered that she was physically unable to have sex, and hers countered with a flurry of contradictory gossiping that he was a sodomite, an adulterer, and impotent. The rumors intensified as the case moved toward an annulment in Rome. Gonzaga partisans crowed that young Vincenzo had spent his teenage years cutting a swathe through a troupe of prostitutes and mistresses and that he was simply too much of a man for poor Margherita. The Farnese narrowed their charges to focus on a single one: the boy was unable to hold an erection. Pope Gregory XIII's decision in 1583 to grant the annulment sent Margherita to a convent and Vincenzo back on the marriage market.

Enter the Medici. They had a sixteen-year-old daughter, Eleonora. They also had doubts: was Vincenzo really able to penetrate a virgin? No use wasting a perfectly good daughter on an alliance that wouldn't produce heirs and continue a dynasty. Letters raced back and forth among the various players for almost a year as they worked out the details of the test, the dowry, and the celebrations.[1] Vincenzo had the testimony of doctors who had measured and analyzed his penis, but the ever-practical Medici wanted hard proof. A widow in the Medici court circle offered her daughter for the test case in return for a dowry and an arranged marriage. Ferrara was to be the setting, with Crown Prince Cesare d'Este agreeing to verify the girl's virginity and to test, with his own hands, the strength of Vincenzo's erection. The girl made the trip, but Vincenzo backed out at the last minute. The girl was released, and the Medici began hinting that they were entertaining an offer for Eleonora from the Duke of Savoy. Backed into a corner, and abandoned when Cesare d'Este decided to withdraw, Vincenzo had to agree to Grand Duke Francesco I's final offer: three tries with a Florentine virgin in the presence of a Tuscan agent. Knowing they had a strong hand and always on the lookout for a bargain, the Medici now bypassed the court circle and reached to the Pietà conservatory for their test virgin, though still keeping with Vincenzo's original request that the girl at least be beautiful. The Gonzaga even sent an agent of their own to Florence to ensure that she was pretty.[2]

The whole troupe congregated secretly in Venice in March 1584 for the test. Medici officials and a female minder instructed the Pietà girl, named Giulia, on what to watch out for. Vincenzo came to see her as soon as he arrived in Venice. He was impressed and eager "to assault her right then and there," as the agent later wrote to Grand Duke Francesco I, but the Tuscans thought that he might be too tired from his travels. The next night he returned "and pressed, but with gentility, to have her." But it was now Friday, a day of penance when no good Catholic should be having sex, so the agent again refused.[3] Finally, on the appointed evening, Vincenzo came to the Tuscan agent's quarters and stripped naked to prove that he wasn't carrying any instruments. The agent found Vincenzo's penis to be disappointingly small, and Vincenzo indeed failed the first test. Although Giulia had been "prepared, primped, and cleaned in every part in a way that would bring desire to a statue" the prince fell asleep after some bored foreplay, then rushed out complaining of a stomachache.[4]

Vincenzo was finally able to penetrate the virgin Giulia on a second try a few nights later, a fact that the agent verified by crawling between the couple and probing with his own hand to ensure that the crown prince's penis was hard and in the right place. By morning, Vincenzo boasted of "breaking three lances" on Giulia, and claimed he would have done it a fourth time if she had only stood still.[5] She, however, was not convinced that she had been, in the language of the day, "devirginated." The Mantuan party scoffed at this but arranged a rematch three nights later. At some point in this Venetian expedition, Vincenzo managed to impregnate Giulia. The Medici were satisfied with their agent's detailed account of the event, including an interview with Giulia that reads like a cross between soft pornography and a veterinarian's report (see the appendix). The agent asked why she had been crying but was more interested in learning just how far Vincenzo had gotten and whether he could sire children. The wedding went ahead within a month. Giulia was relieved of her baby and received a dowry and a husband appropriate to her station. She dropped from the scene, while Vincenzo went on to have five children with Eleonora de' Medici and possibly four more with mistresses.

If attributing the Pietà girls' vulnerability and early deaths to "the sexual politics of Renaissance Florence" seems vague, and if talking about their own sexuality turned into a commodity for sale seems woodenly ideological, then reading about this Pietà girl's encounter with the Crown Prince of Mantua may help bring things into sharper focus. There's something bracing about the sheer efficiency of the exchange. It helps us to understand how girls like the Pietà's Giulia were perceived by Florentine patricians: as objects or items of property, worthy of protection and a degree of care, but valued above all for their utility, convenience, and availability. Their sexuality was something to be protected so that it could be used, and the terms and conditions of that use would not be up to the girl to decide. When the Medici sent Giulia to be raped by Crown Prince

Vincenzo, they were acting on the same values as the merchant or weaver who raped the servant girl he had gotten from the Pietà, or the pox-infected man who raped a virgin niece before abandoning her to a conservatory like the one on Borgo Ognissanti. Taking the girl's virginity cured some problem these men faced—dynastic politics, sexual appetite, venereal disease. Some compensation was still in order. The Medici felt that they acted honorably with Giulia—a dowry and husband were decidedly more than she could have expected when she first entered the Pietà. Yet perhaps because of the uproar that the episode generated, the agent felt compelled to paint her as a willing participant in the scheme. The Tuscan agent admitted that she had cried through the first night but insisted that this was only from the pain of intercourse. When she asked him after the second assault, "I won't be seeing the Prince again?" he took it to mean that she had actually become enamored of Vincenzo. Clearly, he thought she had enjoyed the rape.[6]

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What was killing the girls of the Pietà? There was no single disease, misused medication, or oppressive regimen of work. Many were probably very sick when they entered into the home on Borgo Ognissanti. Crowded conditions, hard work, and a poor diet hastened death. When a widower abandoned a daughter, it wasn't just a sign of his incapacity to raise an adolescent girl. When a widow abandoned a daughter, it wasn't always a sign that she was shedding the fruits of her old marriage before contracting a new one. Sometimes the daughters they abandoned were terminally ill, maimed in an accident, crippled by disease, mentally disturbed, or developmentally handicapped. In a society that valued utility, and that defined a girl's utility primarily by her ability to marry and have children, these girls inevitably would be victims of those sexual politics. And their parents knew it. Abandonment was always an act of desperation, but the alternatives—prostitution above all—were not much better.

Some Florentines aimed to push beyond utility to a different set of values. To speak of "the Pietà" is to reduce the work they did to a noun: an institution and a lay consorority. Yet the women who set up a Company of Compassion to open a Home of Compassion were aiming precisely to show compassion to young girls whose compromised health, situation, or parents put their futures in doubt. This explains the open door they kept in an industrial slum and red-light district; the efforts they made to let the girls maintain contact with families; their willingness to let the girls read *novelle,* sing popular songs, and wear their own clothes; the training and futures they pursued through domestic service; the effort to raise money from pledges and, when it became clear that this would never bring in enough, from the girls' own work. It explains why they might offer medical remedies for blocked wombs and for mysterious problems that suspiciously resembled the French pox.

What was killing the girls of the Pietà wasn't necessarily anything *in* the Pietà. It was the policies *of* the Pietà. The Pieta had a high death rate because it welcomed the dying—girls in bad health and with little future. These were girls weeded out by the entrance procedures adopted at the two other similar shelters in Florence and adopted from 1566 at the Pietà too. The Pietà's death rate dropped when it stopped accepting those girls. They were still dying in Florence—they just weren't dying in the Pietà.

It is easy to romanticize and turn the women of the Company of Compassion into nurturing mothers. The records don't let us see whether they nurtured at all. They simply offered a home and aimed to provide, in keeping with the canonical works of charity, food, clothing, shelter, and medical care to vulnerable girls that no other home accepted. And burial, the final work of charity. Given how sick many of the girls were, the Company of Compassion's shelter in Borgo Ognissanti was as much a hospice, easing the pains of the dying, as it was a conservatory, providing temporary shelter for adolescents who would leave and marry in a few years. It's telling that the women who pledged to support the shelter never called it anything more than a *casa,* or "house."

We also shouldn't romanticize the women of the Compagnia della Pietà because, by the time of the biggest changes that were narrowing its doors and weeding out the sick and hopeless, the hundreds of women who had once supported it had largely disappeared, leaving only a few dozen to keep it going. Did those hundreds leave because of the changes, or did their departure trigger the changes? The documents don't give us any answers, and it's worth recalling that women's confraternities and companies were generally more short-lived than men's. Certainly, enough of the later changes came at the initiative of women who accepted the patriarchal values that subordinated and commodified their gender. The changes spurred by Friar Alessandro Capocchi and Archbishop Antonio Altoviti may have addressed practical problems or moral concerns: small site, unhealthy location, immoral neighbors. Yet the changes turned the Pietà away from being a hospice for victims of sexual politics into an agency of those same sexual politics. It became a cheap convent for the illegitimate daughters of courtiers and patricians and for the legitimate daughters of artisans and merchants who could not afford to dower all their offspring and therefore needed a safe place to put their "surplus daughters." The irony of sexual politics here is that living conditions in the home were worse when the values governing it were less exploitative, precisely because the founding group of women had aimed to exercise compassion to the damaged adolescent girls victimized by those politics. Conditions of health improved only once the administration and governing values changed to become less compassionate and more exploitative. It was after the move out of the red-light district, and after most of the female founders had died, that the Pietà consented to prostitute the girl they called only Giulia to Crown Prince Vincenzo Gonzaga.[7]

At a certain level, the Pietà's transformation into a convent may have been inevitable, and Capocchi, Altoviti, and later Friar Gherardo Fiammingo were simply trying to make the best of a bad situation. When the Pietà women first opened their hospice, they must have known that not all the girls would die shortly. Some would grow old in the hospice, like Mariotta da Fiorenza. Her forty-year disabling illness, including twenty years of blindness, might have been the result of tertiary syphilis. There must have been more women like her in the home. French pox was always debilitating and fatal, but sometimes it took its time.

We don't need to speculate about the pox. Mariotta could have been suffering from any one of a range of congenital or acquired illnesses when she entered. More important, she was not the kind of girl that the "new" Pietà wanted any longer. Relying on sponsors allowed the home to slowly restrict access to a different kind of girl. This was how the Pietà could become, by early 1580s, a shelter that Grand Duke Francesco I could reach into when he sought a virgin for his little test for Crown Prince Vincenzo Gonzaga. It now had a better class of girl and healthier too, and the girls were still there to be used.

Francesco I may have had some advice from a man who knew the Pietà well. The best parts of Giovanni da Sommaia's inheritance had ended up in the hands of the Pietà after his brutal sexual assault of a servant girl with a torch led Florence to fine and exile him and caused his own family to turn their backs on him. Giovanni was nineteen at the time, about the same age as Vincenzo Gonzaga. Deciding he was bestial, his father Girolamo left him the carefully enumerated list of pigs and cows on the family's farms and deeded the family's city home in the Borgo Ognissanti neighborhood to the girls of the Pietà. Girolamo was an old *piagnone* making the point that sometimes morality trumped patrimony. Girolamo promised more to Giovanni if the duke should ever allow him to return from exile, and return he did. Girolamo never lived to see it, but Giovanni's rehabilitation went beyond anything he could have anticipated. His father may have numbered him among the farm animals, but the Florentine patricians still considered Giovanni one of their own. He married the patrician Costanza Guicciardini and began his ascent through the political ranks. At the time of the Gonzaga test in 1584, Giovanni was a member of the Council of 200, had served on the magistracies overseeing the merchants' court and the Florentine prisons, and was starting to move into the ducal court's inner circle. He would rise even higher after Ferdinand I succeeded to the ducal throne after the sudden and somewhat mysterious deaths of his brother Francesco I and his mistress Bianca Capello in 1587. Giovanni da Sommaia became a senator the following year and emerged as one of the duke's most trusted advisors, playing a role in many prominent magistracies and serving almost continually in the inner cabinet called the Magistrato Supremo through the 1590s.

Shortly before the Gonzaga test, Giovanni's daughter Maddalena sponsored a ten-year-old girl Lessandra at the Pietà. Lessandra eventually became a nun there. Since Maddalena may not have been much older than Lessandra, Giovanni would have known and approved of the sponsorship. Was he making amends by this charitable act, as his father so clearly had? Sponsoring Lessandra may mark Giovanni da Sommaia's personal reconciliation with the Pietà, whose new quarters on Via Mandorlo had been paid for with proceeds from the sale of the home that he had grown up in and had once stood to inherit. But what else does it mark? The thought nags: the kind of Florentine patricians who consigned ten-year-old girls permanently to shelters were the kind of Florentines who sent teenage girls from the same shelter to be raped by a crown prince, and who, in an earlier time, had themselves raped and brutalized other teenage girls of a similar social class. The girls were sexual property, and they could be used as adult males decided. Their fates were out of their hands. The patricians, on the other hand, worked together. Girolamo da Sommaia had strictly forbidden the Pietà from selling the family home in Borgo Ognissanti that he left it in his will. When Friar Capocchi and Duke Cosimo I overturned that will and engineered the sale of the house only a few years later, they were also making the point that patriarchy trumped morality: the purchaser they so carefully cleared the way for was none other than Giovanni da Sommaia.[8]

* * *

> Having read the sacred histories, and particularly those of religious orders, I've frequently seen the great damage that comes to moderns when the ancients are obscured and when their memories and their successes are lost. So in 1700, the last year of this century, and having being deputed by my Superiors to be confessor of the Venerable Monastery of the Pietà of the Third Order of St. Dominic of the City of Florence, I resolved to describe by the order and succession of periods the origins, the foundation and progress of this same monastery, so that none of the good news pertaining to this place would be lost, and so that the religious of today could learn from the examples of the old and good religious of the past. I wanted to do this for many years, but was always prevented by other work or by one or another thing. But finally in this year, may the Lord be praised, I can put my desire into practice. I have gathered many records from diverse places and have rewritten them together in this present collection. I confess that there are many motives to this work. First, because this house was founded by the Friars of the Order of St. Dominic, it seems to me appropriate that it falls to a Dominican friar to make public the actions of these fathers and the efforts that they undertook and always undertake, whether in the foundation or in the later advances. Second, because no one could do it like I can, that is with such facility, since it fell to me to see and recover the origins of the perpetual masses of this place. I had easy access to all the books concerning the place, in which I rediscovered some things worthy of mention which others no longer remembered. Third, I have already seen many religious of this house die, who remembered the traditions, and so that the memory would not die with them it seemed good to me to note them. Finally, some things which they remember, they remember very differently from what actually happened. In order that the truth might be given its place and might shine among us, I will not finish until the work is done. These I confess are the

> motives that I had for beginning and that I still have now at the end. I pray to those who will read these records to have compassion with all their heart and to pray always for my soul and for those of my fellow religious, so that we might be blessed in this life and in the other.[9]
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> —Fr. Romano Felice Viccioni, *The Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*

Friar Romano faced a lot of puzzles when he picked up the pen to write the Pietà's history in 1700: gaps in records, imperfect memories, competing interpretations. He needed to root around the archives, read between the lines, and make hypotheses based on comparisons elsewhere. At different points in this investigation, I have criticized *The Chronicles* that he and others compiled as unreliable and misleading. Friar Romano and the other chronicle writers were not exactly writing fiction, but they were certainly inventive with some facts and economical with others. Yet were they to read this history, they would almost certainly make the same accusation of me. Who is right?

Historians aim to base their analysis as much as possible on primary sources, and the history they write reflects the sources they chose to emphasize. At the same time, they write with a purpose and a sense of the broader story into which their own work falls. The purpose and broader story inevitably shapes how historians recognize, read, and fill the gaps between the lines—that is, how they interpret the periods and subjects that documents don't cover, or the context that they take for granted. Friar Romano lays it all out with disarming honesty: he is writing a history so that the achievements and lessons of the past won't be forgotten. He admits to concerns that this is already happening in the Pietà as it has happened in other houses and orders. The oral traditions in the home differ from what he has been able to find in the documents. He does not explain what those documents are, but we can get an idea from the ones that he notes specifically—lists of perpetual masses—and the places that he says he has found them: in his own Dominican house of S. Marco and in the spaces open to him at the Pietà as its spiritual father. This means that he has seen the missals, the catechisms, the songbooks, the statutes, the professions of nuns, the earlier chronicles and spiritual memoirs, and the tables of masses and indulgences. He has not likely looked at the financial registers, the documents detailing cloth work, the medical recipes, or the lists of entrants to the home or members of the company. Or, if he looked at them, he found that they had less to contribute to his vision of Pietà. It is a vision of a home established and spiritually nurtured by Dominicans and intended by God from the beginning to be a convent.

Friar Romano's opening statement of his methodology and values helps us understand why his chronicle has emphases and silences that are so different from what we can reconstruct if we look at the records that were stored not in the Pietà sacristy or the S. Marco library, but in the office of the bookkeeper or prioress. His records are the records of the spiritual fathers, and his history understandably concentrates on their work.

Friar Romano worked from the point of view of what the Pietà had become, and he aimed to show how it had gotten there. This book has worked from the point of view of what the Pietà had been, and how its original purpose and character changed. Records stored in the offices of the bookkeeper and the prioress cover sides of the work that the spiritual fathers had nothing to do with. They inevitably throw a different set of actors into view and paint different sides of day-to-day life. Yet the two accounts don't always fit together neatly and can end up reaching wildly different conclusions. Friar Romano's context is spiritual history, and his purpose is to inspire, to upbuild, and to instruct. The context for this book has been the this-worldly history of a Renaissance city with its obsessions about virginity and sex, its fascination with and fear of teenage girls, its politics and economy in transition, and its population dealing with a strange disease that was sweeping the globe. These contexts themselves instruct, and what they come up with isn't always inspiring.

Mariotta da Fiorenza provides an example. Friar Romano came across her name, age, and disabilities, and reconstructed a holy woman—she appears among a list of the convent's holy women, or *beatas*—whom God permitted to be afflicted with illnesses that would test her patience and refine her virtue. We may see the same details and reconstruct instead a girl infected with the French pox, abandoned by her parents as the symptoms emerged, and crippled by the chronic illness and blindness of tertiary syphilis later in life. Friar Romano constructs Mariotta as a holy adult woman because this is what his context demands—convents have holy women of great virtue and endurance, and this long-suffering nun certainly qualifies. But we may construct her as an infected abandoned child because this is what the context of Florence's social history suggests.

Are these simply two sides or two ages of a single Mariotta? There is an other problem with Friar Romano's long-suffering nun. She never appears in the Pietà's *Libro Segreto*, the list of girls admitted to the home. Even adjusting for the minor error in dating that has her entering the home four years before it opened, no girl of that name, parentage, or age is ever registered by the women of the Pietà. And this is not just a problem with her. Friar Romano describes two other holy women. Fiammetta da Morzanno entered thanks to Alessandro Capocchi and was, in the oral tradition of the home, an exceptionally penitent and austere nun who fled idle conversation and spent her life in prayer. She was beloved by Capocchi and was graced at the very point of his death with a vision of him climbing a mountain, holding a familiar walking stick (*bastone*) that she immediately went and fetched from S. Maria Novella to be a relic at the Pietà. Antonina of Filippo del Frate from Firenzuola entered at the time of Gherardo Fiammingho and experienced special graces and visions and offered prophecies that brought fame to her and to the Pietà. Fiammingho was her spiritual guide and scribe, writing down her revelations in a book that was subsequently lost. A few months after her death, at Christmas in 1638, she appeared at the foot of the bed of a nun suffering from a stomach ulcer, and promised the healing that allowed the girl to rise from her bed on Easter Day.[10]

The problem with these inspiring stories is that neither Sister Fiammetta nor Sister Antonia, nor anyone who more generally matches *The Chronicles*' description of them, ever appears in the Pietà's entrance records. Friar Romano penned conventional biographies that hewed closely to a stereotype that Savonarolan male clergy developed when writing about the nuns who had been under their care and that Sharon Strocchia has explored carefully. Denied creative forms of action in life, the nuns' greatest achievement was to suffer heroically and die peacefully.[11] Or so her Savonarolan supervisors thought and wrote. Taken together with what we've seen earlier of details that are omitted or invented, particularly around the other chaplains but also extending to other sides of the home's history, this highlights a pattern. *The Chronicle*'s writers are so determined to have the Pietà be a work of God and of the Dominicans, that there is no room left for other agents or causes. Ought we to be suspicious that the two friars associated with these fictitious holy women were the two who worked the hardest to change the Pietà? Spiritual history, as written in 1700, could indulge in hypotheses and probabilities but filled in some gaps with pious inventions and closed others with deliberate fraud. Sister Antonia was their candidate for sainthood, and that process demanded a very particular kind of historiography. Friar Romano may not have seen the records that stuffed the shelves of the offices where the bookkeeper and the prioress worked each day. Or he may have seen them and decided that their troubling and sometimes tawdry story did not fit his narrative. He admits as much in his preface—he's writing to set the record straight because "some things which they remember, they remember very differently from what actually happened."

"What actually happened." I've argued that the Pietà on the quiet street of the Almond Tree is a repudiation of the Pietà in the bawdy neighborhood of All Saints, and that *The Chronicles*' authors and editors contributed in subtle ways to the cover-up of that earlier history by what they claimed, altered, and ignored. Some of the claims are simple, such as crediting Dominican friars as its founders. Others are more seriously fraudulent, such as the series of holy women who may be pure inventions. The claims that the girls wept gratefully for their "fathers" of the Dominican Order but cried angrily at their meddling lay "mothers" of the Company of Compassion is perhaps just standard pious rhetoric that we should not pick at. Yet *The Chronicles* sometimes burst into overheated fiction bordering on the bizarre, like the claim that the Pietà girls went en masse to Capocchi's funeral in 1583 and jumped the barriers around his exposed corpse to bathe it with their tears. The sad reality is that many of the girls who had been under his spiritual direction at the Pietà were already dead by the time of his funeral. As to the *The Chronicles*' alterations, many are minor points that likely originated in rivalry between the religious orders, like the persistent refusal to recognize either the high standing or the affiliations of the other friars and priests who served the Pietà as chaplains.[12]

The Chronicles' greater contribution to obscuring "what actually happened" lies in what they ignore: the many deaths, the factory scale of the textile work, the intense work and high social standing of the women of the Pietà, the collapse in finances and administration after the move, the troubles involved in sending girls out as servants, and the later decision to stop letting them out. These are problems and crises we can itemize or reconstruct because of the other manuscript records that remain in the

Florentine State Archive. There are other aspects of the life of the home that are more difficult to prove because they only appear as brief references in later records—above all, the 1570 statutes—as examples of what was no longer permitted in the Pietà: reading everything from popular *novelle* like the works of Grazzini to the Bible, singing the songs of the day, wearing street clothes, going out into the city, and returning for visits to the family home or spending time with relatives who visit in Borgo Ognissanti. Taken together, the claims, alterations, and silences lead us to suspect that there was far more to the Pietà than *The Chronicles* suggest. It was a controversial home, and *The Chronicles* deliberately create an alternative history that obscures "what actually happened."

And what did actually happen? When we look at what is written and what is unwritten, when we read between the lines, and when we project back from "reforms" to reconstruct what was "unreformed," we get a picture of a home that was anything but a convent when it first opened. Hundreds of women created something unique to Florence: a shelter for hundreds of girls that would give an alternative to the usual "virgin cures." It would take girls from the slums without asking too many questions. It would protect these teenagers without imprisoning them. And it would aim to ease precisely those illnesses that arose from their victimization by Florentine sexual politics.

These women challenged more than just the sexual politics of Renaissance Florence—they challenged its political and ecclesiastical establishment. Diplomatically and discretely perhaps, but purposefully too. Those politics and establishments proved stronger in the end, and the women's experiment at the Pietà lasted only a little more than a decade before being co-opted, redirected, and relocated, and before the effort began to carefully remove the traces of what they had done. We need to resist the temptation to turn them into a modern version of Friar Romano's two-dimensional holy women, heroic fictions constructed out of a few archival fragments pasted together with feminist stereotypes and wishful thinking. Friar Romano's context of spiritual history led him to create miracle-working spiritual heroines among the girls. Our context of social, political, and gender history leads us instead to look at their surrogate mothers and piece together a more tentative picture of women who were determined and skillful but ultimately outmaneuvered.

What was killing the girls of the Pietà? Aiming to reconstruct what may have killed Margherita, Maria, Maddalena, and so many other girls, leads us far out on some very shaky limbs. We inch out pursuing hunches and guesses that are suggested by stray references, incomplete documents, and social context. Faced with the later efforts to cover up the earlier history, we need to pursue these hypotheses as far as we can, no matter how improbable they may seem at first. Our investigation may jump suddenly from one limb to another, pursuing a new lead or halted by a new fact or a stubborn silence. The view of the whole shifts as we do. Some limbs bear the weight, but others fall away. Given the sparse documentation, we have to be ready in the end to admit that we don't know "what actually happened."

We can't say for sure what was killing the girls. They died in a city that had little use for them beyond cheap labor and possibly cheap sex. And they died for reasons that had everything to do with their age, gender, and vulnerability as lower-class girls who had been abandoned by their families. We may not be able to discover the exact causes of their deaths, and we may well decide that hypotheses around overwork, abortion, or syphilis are too speculative and unsubstantiated. Yet we can re-create at least some of the circumstances of their short lives and understand who helped them and how. The Casa della Pietà remains a mystery cloaked in silences. But that needn't prevent us from admiring the exceptional experiment in compassion that a few hundred Florentine women fought for in the middle of the sixteenth century.

APPENDIX

Sexual Politics

Giulia and the Crown Prince Gonzaga

What ended in the staged serial raping of a Pietà girl by the Crown Prince of Mantua began in the high-stakes marriage games played by late Renaissance Italian nobility. In 1580, the Medici tried to interest the highly eligible Vincenzo Gonzaga in their oldest daughter Eleonora. The Mantuan ruling family held out for a rich prize: a dowry of 1 million ducats and agreement that the Gonzaga would from now on take precedence over the Medici in the court and diplomatic circles. The Medici blinked, and Vincenzo married Margherita Farnese instead a year later in 1581. The immediate collapse of that marriage set off an intense row between the families that carried on to the highest levels of the Catholic Church, where Cardinal Gonzaga fought fiercely for, and Cardinal Farnese fiercely against, the annulment that would end the marriage and allow Vincenzo to marry again.[1]

Vincenzo's victory in this round was predictable—in the game of high politics, it was far more important to let a crown prince marry and carry on a dynasty than to preserve the honor of a young girl. But it was distinctly double-sided win, for it sent the Gonzaga back to a Medici family that was determined to drive a harder bargain while also extracting a little revenge for their earlier humiliation. The question of whose ambassador would take precedence in international courts was never raised, and the Tuscans now offered a much lower dowry that Vincenzo could hardly refuse. Yet it was the Medici demand that Vincenzo prove beyond a doubt that he was able to penetrate a virgin that was most humiliating for the Gonzaga and that most shocked Italian court circles. The Medici refused all pleas to reconsider what many denounced as an impious request and were determined to dictate the terms of the test.

The letters between the two families began in May 1583 but intensified from December of that year. The Duke of Mantua agreed to the test on 12 November 1583, and the two sides negotiated a dowry of 300,000 scudi by 6 January 1584. On 30 January, the Medici were still pressing for a series of tests with a Florentine virgin, to be held on neutral ground in Ferrara, that would continue until there was proof that the girl was impregnated. The girl would then go into a convent and the baby into the Innocenti foundling home. Yet when Vincenzo Gonzaga and Crown Prince Cesare d'Este of Ferrara both withdrew, the Medici agreed to compromise a little. By 17 February 1584, they agreed to settle for proof of Vincenzo's ability to penetrate a virgin and set about to find a Florentine virgin who would cost little and who could be set aside easily after the test.

On that day, a Volterran nobleman Belisario Vinta wrote to a friend that he had been asked by both Grand Duke Francesco I and Mantua's Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga to find "a virgin girl, healthy and of comparable appearance and beauty and of an age equal to that of the Princess [Eleonora]." Four days later, Vinta wrote to Grand Duke Francesco:[2]

> All this day, Messer Piero Cappelli and I pursued this business. In the *Innocenti* and in many other hospitals we did not find anything good, [the girls] being all disabled (*sgratiate*), scabby (*rognose*), and of such bad flesh and appearance as to make you nauseous. Only in the *Abbandonate*, which are where the nuns of the Ceppo once stayed, did we find two who weren't bad to look at, but they are 21 years old. They have been set aside, but not finally [picked], depending on their age which is older than what you had wanted.

Vinti later reported that the girl he considered the more promising of the two had a noble bearing and was modest, but he also warned that it would take a couple of days to "clean her and fix her up" (*ripulirla et riordinarla*). He brought this girl to his house on the afternoon of 22 February and later that evening wrote to the grand duke describing both her and the challenges that they faced.[3]

> The name is Giulia, she is in her 21st year, she is large and has a noble aspect, neither too thin nor too fat. She has a pleasing face, in my judgement, and beyond that seems even better because she doesn't act as though she was raised in a hospital, but was raised well, with modesty and a sense of shame (*vergognosa*), yet also lively and knowing, and there is a hope that she will be fit to be taught. The most difficult thing is to be able to have contact with the girl, and between guarding the secrecy of the operation as much as possible, and training these fillies who have not yet seen men, I will need to be industrious in my strategies.

He went on to describe part of that strategy, with arguments showing how much the wealthy Medici were keeping an eye on the bottom line:

> She is dressed in black, with nothing but a veil on her head. Before anything else, and at the very least, I'll have to dress her now in some colourful perpignan and have sleeves, gathers, vests, and collars made for her to show her to best effect for the Mantuan, and because the clothes would serve her for the

> trip in case she is satisfactory. If she doesn't please, the clothing can still be given to her for the love of God, because even if it is necessary to send her back, which I don't believe will be the case, she deserves the protection that the great charity of Your Highness will afford. If she does indeed please, then we will go ahead and dress her in some white clothes, and make some garlands and have her hair done, though all with the greatest savings possible and without excessive decoration. And above all these things, and to speed things up, because the test can't go ahead during Holy Week, I ask Your Holiness to reply to me with everything that you wish.

Vinta needed immediate answers to a few specific questions: would the Prince be allowed to return a second night if the first night's test was inconclusive? Might the preliminary inspection and approval of the girl happen quickly, since time was of the essence? Did the grand duke have any problem with Giulia's age: "I've said that she's 21 years, though she doesn't look it, but this age might not please Your Highness."[4]

The grand duke signaled approval and Vinta moved quickly to prepare Giulia for a visit from the Mantuan agent Dr. Marcello Donati. Donati had already received a worried letter from Vincenzo Gonzaga that showed how much the prince was on the sidelines in these negotiations between dukes Medici and Gonzaga.[5]

> Check on the girl [they have] prepared for this, and see if in her there are the right qualities: of age, of ability, and other things that you know to look for. And in case the person whom they've prepared in the first instance doesn't seem right to you, insist that they find another . . . and after having found a person who seems satisfactory, take care that she is sent without loss of time to Venice with the promised secrecy. We will be at the same time in that city to do the test. Return here quickly to give a report on what you have done.

Donati went to Florence to check her out and told Vinta that, while it would be preferable if Giulia were better looking, she would do.[6] While some later authorities claim that she was a bastard daughter of the noble Albizzi family, none of the contemporary letter writers allude to this. They refer to her sometimes by her first name and more often as "the subject" (*il soggetto*) or "the young girl" (*la giovane*). At no point in the letters, do we learn how much Giulia knew about the scheme. The courtiers and agents don't indicate whether she participated voluntarily or whether, as the Florentine chronicler claimed, her central role in the test of the prince's potency came as an unwelcome surprise.[7]

The parties now moved to neutral ground in Venice. Vincenzo played the part of a confident Lothario from the time he arrived in the city and saw Giulia for the first time. He crowed that he was ready to conduct the test then and there, but Vinta thought it best to wait. Was Vincenzo bluffing or screwing up his courage? The first test a few nights later was a humiliating failure. While Vinta lay wide awake and fully clothed on the bed in the next room waiting for the sounds of success, Vincenzo fell asleep on top of Giulia, and after a couple of hours, he ran out of the room clutching his stomach, saying, "Cavaliere, oh my, my my, I feel sick." Vinta asked Giulia what had happened and the girl's adult female guardian (*guardadonna*)—a key companion and coach whom Vinta never bothered to name in his letters—quickly checked and confirmed that she was still a virgin.[8]

Vinta was nothing if not efficient. The morning of the next test a few days later, he summoned a surgeon, Pietro Galletto, to come to the suite and examine the prince's penis. Galletto arrived in the room to find the prince dressed only in a shirt and long robe. Vinta explained what he needed from Galletto, and the prince obliged the examining doctor by pulling back the robe and shirt so that he could conduct a physical examination. Galletto's full physical examination left him satisfied that the rumors of the prince's underdeveloped testicles were baseless. Yet as he wrote in a letter to Grand Duke Francesco I the next morning, "Because the animal wasn't upright, I couldn't tell if it could get fully inside."[9]

Vincenzo returned after dark that night for his second chance. Vinta had Giulia under a tight guard in an inner room without windows and wouldn't let anyone but the *guardadonna* near her. He checked that the crown prince had nothing but his natural equipment with him before letting Vincenzo join Giulia and then once again settled in to wait in the next room. Vinta may have been suspicious when, less than an hour later, he received a note from the Mantuan agent Donati inviting the Florentines to transfer the entire operation to the far nicer palazzo that the Mantuans had rented as their headquarters in Venice. A gondola was waiting outside, Donati wrote, and in short order the couple could be doing their work in comfort on a familiar bed. Vinta scrawled a terse and frustrated reply on the bottom of the page and sent it back:[10] "Giulia is crying and wants to leave the house, and if the Prince, whether by day or night wants to carry out not a test but his own caprices, it is his to decide. I'm unfortunately fighting against the brain of a woman, and often it threatens to compromise everything. I kiss your hand and in reverence to His Highness I kiss his hand too. From the House on 15 March 1584." An hour after writing this, Vinta heard Giulia in a soft voice calling, "Cavaliere, cavaliere, come here, touch and feel it with your hand." He rushed into the room and "with a bit of shame and respect" climbed onto the bed. While Giulia wept, Vincenzo leaned back on his elbow to let Vinta feel around with his hand and check that everything was as it ought to be and where it ought to be.

The next morning Vincenzo Gonzaga called the surgeon Pietro Galletto back to settle all doubts by performing a second full physical examination while Giulia lay beside him in the bed. Galletto found the now-rigid penis to be "big enough" and saw that it hadn't damaged Giulia. Clearly wanting to put all rumors to rest, Vincenzo asked the doctor to also check the fistula that he had at the base of his penis and that some doctors had suspected might make him unable to insert his member fully and hence to procreate. Galletta obliged and reported in a letter to Grand Duke Francesco I that while the fistula was indeed there, and was about the size of a goldsmith's weight, "it has nothing to do with the instrument of coitus, and in every other part he seems to me a fit Prince (*un bel Principe*) and that you don't need to worry about him."[11]

Belisario Vinta was not convinced. That same morning, while a lively, jubilant, and boastful Vincenzo dressed and bantered with his servant, Vinta took Giulia aside and, together with the *guardadonna*, asked a few questions. By the next day, he had written up the interview, leaving the bombshell for the end, and sent it off to Florence:[12]

> Asked whether the Prince had an instrument of metal or of glass, or of some other material, with which he had opened her before using her. She responded "no."
>
> Whether she swears to tell me the truth. She responded "yes."
>
> Whether he had made her wider and opened her violently with the finger. She responded "no, but that he had only placed the human member (*il membro di carne*)"
>
> Whether he had offered or given jewels, money, or other things, or whether he was silent about this or said anything—she responded that "he had not given or offered her anything, neither spoken to her of this thing."
>
> How many times did he do it? She said "she remembered the third time definitely, but that there seemed to be four." The Prince said that at the fourth in the daytime she did not want to stay put.
>
> Whether the first time she cried. She said "no, and the Prince had said that he would do it quickly but that he did not insert it directly in, and that because of that she did not cry. But at the second time he really did put it in her, and she cried, and that at that point she called Cavalier Vinta."
>
> Asked whether Cavalier Vinta was called at the first or at the second time. She said "at the second."
>
> Whether she felt it when Cavalier Vinta put his hand between her private parts and that of the Prince. She said "yes."
>
> Whether at that point she had it inside. She said "yes."
>
> Whether she cried out of shame or because it hurt her. She said "because I felt hurt."

Whether she felt hurt inside, or because it had been stuck on the outside. She said "inside."

Whether he was hard and solid. She said "yes, and that it hurt her."

Whether when the Prince shoved it in to her, whether he held it propped up with the fingers. She said that in straightening it up and putting it in, but then no, because he embraced me with both of his arms.

Whether she heard the Prince panting. She said, "two times."

Whether all the times that he put it in, she felt it hard. She said "yes."

Whether the Prince had it in so much that he could not spill outside. She said "yes."

Whether she had given off semen. She said that "the second time that the Prince did it, shortly after he pulled out, she felt it dribble down her private parts, and that then also on the third time it 'exited', and that it completely dirtied the back of her shirt, and that she doubted that it had been blood."

Whether she had felt pleasure in the ejaculation of semen. She said that "she had seemed to feel something two times."

Whether she had fear that the Prince would not be pleased if she spoke the truth. She said, "No, and that she spoke the truth."

Whether, once she rose, she had felt the semen dribbling from her vagina. She said "Yes, while she was sitting."

Whether the Prince had done nothing, if that's what she would have said, as she had said the other time. She said, "Yes."

Whether she ever put her hand on the Prince's penis. She said "no, except for a time when the Prince had taken her hand put it there, but she had withdrawn it out of shame."

Whether her private parts had touched that of the Prince. She said "yes."

Whether every young girl who had to take a husband would be able to be pleased with the Prince. She said "yes, in the way that this was intended."

Whether she had cared that the Prince had returned to her. She said "yes."

Whether finally it seemed to her that she had been devirginated. She said, "The first time it didn't seem to me that he had put it very much in to me." Asked what she had noticed, she said, "because in pulling it out, it came out quickly."

Asked another time whether it seemed to her that she had been devirginated or not. She said that "it didn't seem so," and dropped her head to her chest.

The questions which the guardadonna asked, and that which she repeated are contained in the letter to Your Highness.

The account that she made of the last night's work (*nottolata*), is also contained in the letter to Your Highness.

Though the sheets were bloodied and the *guardadonna* was satisfied that Vincenzo had passed the test, Giulia's own conviction that she was still a virgin left some doubts about the prince. While outwardly scornful, the Mantuans were anxious. They again tried to get Giulia out of Vinta's tightly guarded apartment and over to their palace. Vinta wouldn't hear of it, so a few nights later, and under the same tight security, he was again examining Gonzaga at the door of the bedroom while Giulia waited inside. This time the results were less ambiguous. As Vincenzo's brother Carlo wrote in a letter to their father:[13]

> Beyond what you may have heard from Sig. Marcello [Donati], you should know that the Prince this night returned to the girl, and the thing has been carried off in such a way that neither she, nor Signore Vinta, nor their doctor wants to repeat it. And I this morning spoke to everyone and they are all very satisfied and they are happy together with our companions. Of this I wanted to give an account to Your Highness, so that you would know that in this test there doesn't remain a single doubt in the world.

A single doubt of what? Given that a fistula on the penis was commonly understood as a sign of the pox, the Medici may have looked beyond questions of the Prince's potency and thought of Giulia as a "virgin cure" for Vincenzo before he would wed and bed their daughter Eleonora. This would certainly make it doubly important that she be truly "de-virginated" and would explain Vinta's insistence on this point. Regardless, a jubilant Vincenzo now left Venice and in less than a month was exchanging marriage vows with Eleonora de' Medici in Florence before the pair moved off to Mantua for the formal state wedding. Despite many children and many mistresses, questions of potency returned to dog him later in life. In 1609, when he was forty-seven years old, Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga sponsored an explorer to head overseas to the Americas on a special expedition among the aboriginal tribes to see whether these people, legendarily potent, might have some drug, potion, or salve that would allow him to maintain an erection. He died before the explorer returned.[14]

Giulia too left Venice and drops out of the historical record. She did not return to the Casa della Pietà. The Medici had originally planned to send her to a convent and to deposit her child in the Innocenti foundling home. Yet other records, including a contemporary chronicle, report that the Medici provided a dowry and married her off to a roman musician named Giuliano who was living in Florence. This was perhaps better than the fate otherwise in store for her as a Pietà girl, though in this, as in everything else to do with the case, she had no say in how she was handled. And the child? The music historian Tim McGee has proposed that the couple did not lose the baby after all, but raised him as a musician. McGee suggests that the boy was Pompeo Caccini, son of the Medici court musician Giuliano Romano Caccini. Pompeo became a famous singer, teacher, and theatrical set designer in the early seventeenth century. He was also infamous for getting into trouble with women, and on one of the occasions when he was hauled before the Florentine magistrates, he was described as "Giuliano's bastard child." Not perhaps a bastard that the older musician had sired, but one he had raised.[15] There are problems with this hypothesis, not the least of them being that the woman who married Giuliano Romano Caccini and raised Pompeo is called "Lucia" in the documents. We know as little of her origins as we do of the fate of the Pietà's Giulia, who drops without a trace from the conservatory's records. The Medici and Gonzaga had tried their best to keep the story secret; did they give her a new name when they gave her a new husband? It is yet another question mark in a story full of mysteries.

NOTES

Abbreviations

AAF	Archivio Arcivescovile di Firenze
AD	Acquisiti Diversi
ASF	Archivio di Stato di Firenze
Bigallo	Compagnia poi Magistrato di S. Maria del Bigallo
BNCF	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (Firenze)
BRF	Biblioteca Riccardiana (Firenze)
Ceppo	Fanciulle Abbandonate di S. Maria e S. Niccolò detto del Ceppo
CRSGF	Conservatorio di Domenicane denominato La Pietà di Firenze
OGBP	Otto di Guardia e Balia del Principato
SMN	Santa Maria Novella

Chapter 1. Mystery and Silence

1. The Pietà began its first matriculation list of the girls, called the *Libro Segreto*, on 25 January 1555 when it registered fifty-girls girls (ASF CRSGF 112/78, 1r–13r). #49 Margherita di Ma Betta di Firenze. Registered 25 January 1555 at age 9, and sent to S. Maria Nuova February 1555 (13r). #88 Maria di Neghrante, *soldato da zonta di Mugiello*. Registered 6 March 1555 at age 9 and sent to S. Maria Nuova March, 1556 (22r). #108 Maddalena *da Fra Billj dall Certosa di Firenze*. Registered 15 July 1555 at age 12, and sent April 1556 to S. Maria Nuova (26r). The Florentine year began 25 March, but all dates in this book have been altered to modern form.

2. These six girls were all part of the first cohort of fifty two: ASF CRSGF 112/78: #39 Bartolomea di Mona Caterina di Mugello (10r); #30 Chaterina di Bastiano legniauolo (8r); #20 Lizabetta di Giovanni di Firenze (5r); #14 Agniola di Bastiano di Monte Aciuto (4r); #44 Lucrezia di Giulio dal Como da Giocho (10r); #41 Brigida di Antoniano da Firenze (10r). thirty-four of the first cohort of fifty-two girls (65.38) died while wards of the Casa della Pietà.

3. ASF, Acquisti e Doni, 291, "Onesta" [1560–83] this unpaginated notebook

contains summaries of condemnations before the Magistrato del Onestà from 1560–83. See also Brackett, "The Florentine Onestà," 273–300.

4. Terpstra, *Abandoned Children.*

5. BRF, Moreni, AD 93.

6. On the physical and social contexts of adolescent sexuality, see Horowitz, "Worlds of Jewish Youth," 83–119, and Crouzet-Pavan, "Flower of Evil," 173–221. On girls in particular, see also Potter, "Greensickness in *Romeo and Juliet*," 271–91, and Parsons, "Medieval Aristocratic Teenaged Female," 311–21.

Chapter 2. The Setting: Sex and the City

1. *I germini sopra quaranta meretrice.* My thanks to Nerida Newbigin for the translation. Antonfrancesco Grazzini penned his plays on the model of Roman comedies between 1540 and 1566, though few were actually staged during his lifetime. Grazzini, *Il teatro del Lasca,* 576–78. Rondini, *Antonfrancesco Grazzini,* 1–19. Two of Grazzini's plays have been translated, *Il Frate* (*The Friar*) and *La Pinzochera* (often translated as *The Bawd*, though "The Holy Woman" might better convey Grazzini's wry irony). D'Orazio, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini (Il Lasca)."

2. Strocchia, "Taken into Custody," 177–200.

3. Grazzini [D'Orazio], *La Pinzochera*, Act 1, Scene 6. On adolescent sexuality, see Eisenbichler, *The Premodern Teenager,* and particularly the following articles: Taddei, "Puerizia, adolescenza and giovinezza." 21–24; Stoertz, "Sex and the Medieval Adolescent" 228–29, 234–38; Lansing, "Girls in Trouble," 293–96.

4. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships.*

5. So, for example, prostitute Margherita Negri purchased a lifetime exemption from the regulations on prostitution for 60 scudi, which was the cost of the cheapest dowry needed to enter the Convertite. Cohen, *Evolution of Women's Asylums,* 49–53. The regulations are given in ASF Onestà, ms. 1.

6. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 373–414. Brackett, "Florentine Onestà," 273–300. Trexler claimed on the basis of the Onestà's prosecution of rule breakers that most of the clientele were foreigners, but since courts of all kinds tended to prosecute foreigners disproportionately, this is a shaky assumption at best. Disproportionate numbers of foreigners among prostitutes could also indicate either economic depression in their native territories or local prejudices that prevented them from getting other forms of work. Goldberg, "Pigs and Prostitutes," 178–79, 190.

7. On tavern names: Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love,* 96. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 387.

8. Trexler, "Florentine Prostitution," 410–12. This was a common phenomenon across Europe. Goldberg, "Pigs and Prostitutes," 182–85.

9. Marco di Andrea Finocchio's assault occurred in 1555: ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Carnesechi, n.p. For foreign women as prostitutes, see ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Onestà, n.p. (1566).

10. Gangs could either be informal groups of young men, the more organized festive groups known as *potenze*, or groups of journeymen. Niccoli, *Il seme della violenza*. Niccoli, "Rituals of Youth," 75–94. Some of this upheaval could also be by neighborhood groups in defense of territory. Rosenthal, "Spaces of Plebian Ritual," 161–81.

11. Regulations: ASF Onestà ms. 1, 27r–31v, 33v–35v. On the 100 braccia rule, see the letter of 6 May 1561 to Duke Cosimo I. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, "Onestà e Meretrici." Of the 1,594 charges, 13 were assault, 11 *baccano*, and 10 pimping; 30 of those charged had participated in some form of group violence: ms. 3, 5r, 15v; ms. 4, 1r–10r.

12. For the regulations on clothing of 1527, 1544, 1547, 1548, 1555, 1558, see ASF Onestà, ms. 1, 24v, 32v–33r, 36r, 36v–37r, 38r. For the consolidated and revised regulations of 1577, see ASF Onestà ms. 3. See also Siegmund, *Medici State and Ghetto of Florence*, 203–5. Siegmund downplays the spatial connection to the brothel, arguing that prostitutes were widely distributed through the city and that there was no longer a single red-light district.

13. Eighteen new regulations or decrees overhauled the Onestà's procedures from 1544 to 1560, and three warnings issued in the later 1560s showed that Cosimo I was alert to the magistrates efforts to avoid or undermine the new regulations. ASF Onestà, ms. 1, 27r–43r. In 1558, magistrates added four streets to the 1547 list of eighteen (38v). On regulations against courtesans, see ASF Onestà ms. 3, 13v–14v; 17v. Grazzini [D'Orazio], *La Pinzochera*, Act IV, Scene 2.

14. ASF Onestà, ms. 1, 27r–33r. The information was in a 1560 report by the Onestà informing the magistracy of the Pratica Segreta, which prostitutes could work what streets under what conditions: ASF Aquisti e Doni, 291, Onestà, n.p. A 1551 administrative census for Tuscany gives the terms and income for Onestà magistrates. d'Addario, "Burocrazia, economia e finanze," 414–15.

15. Cosimo I and his sons tended to disregard the lines between state and personal revenues, using state resources to accumulate properties and build the family fortune. Cosimo I accumulated debts totaling 2,516,352 scudi, the bulk of it between 1545 and 1557. After this, he began lending large sums to clients and foreign rulers like Philip II of Spain. The ducal family raided the revenues of hospitals like the Innocenti and took enormous low-cost loans from the pawn bank of the Monte di Pietà to cover the costs of dowries, paintings, jewels, and military campaigns. They also incurred personal debts with foreign bankers and then made forced levies on hospitals and pious institutions or assigned their

creditors the revenues of particular taxes or magistracies as a form of repayment. At least one-third of their private debts were repaid by Florentine taxpayers. Parigino, *Il tesoro del principe,* 64–114, 186–87, 190–200. See also Najemy, *A History of Florence,* 473–76.

16. This regulation regarding the prostitutes' *rassegna* appears in the new volume of reformed Onestà statutes adopted in 1577 under Francesco I. ASF Onestà, ms. 3, 15v.

17. The Orbatello was built 1370–77. For what follows, see Trexler, "Widows' Asylum," 415–48.

18. From 1500–1517, 74 girls married, and they contributed an average of 76 lire to dowries that averaged 134 lire. Trexler, "Widows' Asylum," 434, 440.

19. But it all started falling apart in the later sixteenth century. Searching for some place cheaper than a convent where its mid-level officials could place their unmarried daughters, the Florentine government began installing them in the Orbatello in the 1540s. Within a few decades, the financial collapse of the Innocenti foundling home left it with a far bigger problem, and it ordered many of that institution's older girls into the Orbatello. These women had scant regard for either the Parte's rules or the matrons' authority, and some turned the Orbatello on its head by running a brothel out of their rooms. See Trexler, "Widows' Asylum," 441–48.

20. Cohen, *Evolution of Women's Asylums,* 13.

21. Cohen, *Evolution of Women's Asylums*, 35.

22. Cohen, *Evolution of Women's Asylums*, 41–60.

23. The Onestà regularly booked expenses that exceeded the income from fines. D'Addario, "Burocrazia, economia, e finanze" 414–15. S. Maria delle Vergine averaged annual costs of 5,400 lire for less than twenty girls, while S. Niccolò averaged 11,500 lire for fifty to sixty. Terpstra, *Abandoned Children,* 291. On the fees collected in 1569, see Canosa and Colonnello, *Storia della prostituzione,* 107–9.

24. Death tax: ASF Onestà, ms. 1, 40r–41v. Portion of fine: ibid., 42r. A letter to Cosimo I of 5 October 1559 sets the Convertite's population at over one hundred mouths and describes the difficulty of feeding them. Ibid., 41v.

25. The efforts in 1553, 1558, and 1559 to gain the property of deceased prostitutes. ASF Onestà ms. 1, 39v–40r, 41v–42r. The regulations of 10 February 1558 and 8 July 1569 for removal from the registry. ASF Onestà ms. 3, 26r–31v. See also Cohen, *Women's Asylums*, 45–53.

26. Dean and Lowe, *Marriage in Italy.* Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual.* Molho, *Marriage Alliance.* The restrictions that Catholic girls faced were quite similar to those faced by Jewish girls. Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style.*

27. Grazzini, *Il Frate* Act I, Scene 3. Translation D'Orazio, 74.

28. Grazzini, *La Pinzochera*, Act V, Scene 5. Translation D'Orazio, 208.

29. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Carnesecchi, n.p., cases of 1563, 1545, 1561, 1553; Onesta, n.p., cases of 1564, 1565, 1566.

30. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Carnesecchi, n.p., cases of 1560 and 1563.

31. Some of these dynamics are explored in Brucker, *Giovanna and Lusanna*.

32. Grazzini, *La Pinzochera*, Act V, Scenes 7–11.

33. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Carnesecchi, n.p., cases of 1560 and 1563.

34. For an expansion of what follows: Terpstra, "Competing Visions," 1319–1355.

35. Ginori's shelter had been in the former S. Niccolò dei Fantoni ospedale. S. Maria delle Vergine occupied the Ospedale Bini until 1557, when it moved briefly to the larger S. Marco monastery outside the S. Gallo gate at the north end of Florence. It returned to the Bini within a year and finally moved to the former Convento del Ceppo on the north bank of the Arno in 1564. See Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, 51–53, 69.

36. There were many variants on the stories of how St. Nicholas (270–343) dowered the girls: with three sacks on one night, or as da Voragine's *Golden Legend* had it, one sack on each of three nights years apart to coincide with their coming of age. da Voragine, *Golden Legend*, I, 21–22.

37. ASF, Ceppo, ms. 145, 161r, 165r. BRF, Moreni, AD 93, 10r–12v.

38. ASF Fondo Manoscritti, #603, inserto 28.

39. The quarters were later taken over by the Fatebenefratelli and turned into the hospital of S. Giovanni di Dio. In later renovations, the pilgrims' hall became the nave of a church; it measures 8 meters wide by 17 meters deep. Some modern sources put the Vespucci palazzo at this corner of Via Nuova and Borgo Ognissanti, though sixteenth-century sources, like the census noted below, do not support this. Diana, *San Matteo e San Giovanni di Dio,* 123–29.

40. ASF Bigallo, 1229 #43; compare with the finished report: ASF Bigallo 1700, 4r.

41. ASF Bigallo, 763, ASF Bigallo, 1687. The 1543 survey and Domenico's account are in ASF Bigallo 1700, 4r. Luigi Vespucci's account book and the testimony of his neighbors. ASF Bigallo, 1225, #5 and 1232, #4.

42. Among the contemporary chronicles that are silent on the Pietà: Francesco di Andrea Buonsignori, *Memorie [1530–1565]*; Marucelli, *Cronaca Fiorentina 1537–1555*; Bernardo Segni. *Istorie Fiorentine*; Richa, *Notizie istoriche*. Passerini, *Storia degli stabilmenti*. Diana, *San Matteo e San Giovanni di Dio*: 123–29.

43. ASF Decima Granducale, ms. 3782, 40r.

44. #614 has the heirs of Lapo di Marco Vespucci, Piero di Giuliano Vespucci,

and Marco di Alessandro Vespucci renting to Antonio de Nolli and a priest Bartolomeo da Empoli in a house valued at 60 scudi (5 bocche). #622 has Maria, widow of Bernardo di Paolo Vespucci, in a house valued at 30 scudi rent. This is the side of the street whose houses back on to the Arno River. ASF Decima Granducale, ms. 3782, 36r. Andrea Vespucci was later a member of the Compagnia della Pietà, ASF CRSGF 112/97, 34r, 57r, 76r.

45. For S.Maria Vergine: ASF Ceppo 145, 171–87. For S. Niccolò: ASF Ceppo 59. A 1570 census records 57 girls (105v–118v), and a 1579 one records 50 (129v–135r). The 1562 Florence census had recorded 122 girls, a number which could include those girls who were formally under S. Niccolò's supervision but who were living as servants in households across the city.

46. ASF CRSGF 112/78 (1554–59) and 112/79 (1558–1623).

47. Of the 361, 224 (62%) clearly had roots outside the city. For comparative statistics on age ranges and origins, see Terpstra, *Abandoned Children,* 79–81, 301 n. 24.

48. For statistics on outcomes, see Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, 256–65, 277.

49. Some of these girls died after the move to via Mandorlo in 1568, though the absence of death dates for some makes the exact number impossible to determine. Of the 361 girls registered in the *Libro Segreto* (ASF CRSGF 112/78), 210 died at the Pietà. Dates of death are given for 182, and of these, 167 die before the move in 1568.

50. The death rates were 11.36% at S. Maria delle Vergine and 19.82% at S. Niccolò. ASF Ceppo mss 59, 145.

Chapter 3. Renaissance Teenagers: Working Girls

Epigraph. This is a modernized and simplified paraphrase of the original text. Dallington, *A Survey* (1596), 32–33.

1. ASF CRSGF ms. 112/97, 120r, 122r (Margherita Boninsegni: 1554–55); ms. (Alessandra di Girolamo: 1555–83); ms. 112/78, 43r, #168 (Brigida di Franxino Pesilli da Pansano: 1583–1601); ms. 112/78, 57r, #220; ms. 112/79, 8r, #41 (Chaterina di Piero legniauolo: 1601–13).

2. For these figures and what follows, all documents are from ASF CRSGF/112. 1555: 6062.18.04 (ms. 97, 235), 1556: 9034.15.00 (ms. 96, 82), 1557: 10,612.11.08 (ms. 55, 25), 1558: 10,418.15.04 (ms. 55, 108). For contemporary costs and wages, see Morelli, *La seta fiorentina,* 66, 68. Goldthwaite, "An Entrepreneurial Silk Weaver," 88, 97–98.

3. Mona Loretta was among the fifty-two people registered on the first day: 25 January 1554. She remained until her death in June 1560. CRSGF 112/78, 3r, #10; 73r, #286.

4. Sixty-eight of 526 girls. ASF CRSGF mss 112/78 and 79.

5. Agnioletta di Lorenzo da Casentino went to Gondi's house after only two weeks in the Pietà (ASF CRSGF ms. 112/78, 32, #129); Margherita di Gallani (ms. 112/78, 3, #12).

6. ASF CRSGF ms. 112/78, 10r (#78), 73r (#285), 32r (#125); ms. 112/79, 57r (#342).

7. Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*. C. Klapisch-Zuber, "Female Celibacy and Service," 176–77.

8. Between the two lists, sixty-eight girls go out, and twenty-five come back.

9. ASF CRSGF 112/79, 32, #189.

10. Of the sixty-eight girls who go into service from 1554 to 1572, twenty-nine went to work with masters or widows in the textile trade.

11. Betta di Pagolo was nineteen when she went to work and study with Agostino di Berto in 1562 and had been in the Pietà for five years; she was back at the Pietà in two years (112/78, 75r, #292; 112/79 #31). Nannia di Stefano was fourteen when her contract began in 1561 and had been in the Pietà for four years: ms. 112/78, 70r #273; ms. 112/79, 22r #126.

12. Agniola entered the Pietà 6-XII-1566, went to work for Botti in 24-IV-1576, returned to the Pietà 14-II-1581, and won her ruling for 36 *scudi* on 11-IV-1581. On 1-IV-1587, she married Francesco di Lorenzo Callani of Quarachi. ASF CRSGF 112/79, 52r (#306).

13. Domenica di Bernardino da Siena entered the Pietà in 1560 and went into service with Mona Margherita in 1568 (CRSGF 112/79, 31r, #182). Camilla di Lorenzo Palazzuolo: CRSGF 112/79, 49r, #275. Antonia di Marco Dalloro's case has to be pieced together by comparing the two registers of girls, which were overlapping in 1560: in CRSGF 112/78, 77r #298 the weaver is widow Domenica, and in CRSGF 112/79, 3r, #14, it is Domenico Verdonne. Apart from this instance, none of the four girls who went to work with widows returned to the Pietà.

14. Receipts from cloth work in lire: 590.14.00 (1555), ASF 112/97, 235r. 2027.13.00 (1556), ASF 112/96, 82r. 2395.13.08 (1557), 3386.10.08 (1558) 3786.00.00 (1559—partial) 112/55, 25r, 108r, 183r.

15. ASF CRSGF 112/2.

16. "Questo libro e delle fanciulle della pieta e chiamasi giornale segnato *A* tenuto per me [blank] una di dette fanciulle" ASF CRSGF 112/2, 1r.

17. ASF CRSGF 112/2, 44v, 46r.

18. The most complete current survey of the Florentine textile industry is Goldthwaite, *Economy of Florence,* 265–340.

19. On gendered labor in the wool industry, see Brown and Goodman, "Women and Industry." See also Goldthwaite, *Economy of Florence*, 322–36, 367–76. Franceschi, "Les enfants au travail," 69–82. De Roover, "A Florentine Firm."

20. Edler de Roover, *Medieval Terms of Business,* 149, 279–80.

21. Edler de Roover, *Medieval Terms of Business*, 279–80.

22. Payments in lire/soldi/denari, with weights in parentheses, from ASF CRSGF 112/2, 56r–v, 71r, 78r, 83r and 112/29, 1v–7r: Using the two books allows us to track a single year according to the Florentine reckoning (that is, taking March 25 as New Year's Day): Andrea Parenti 265.04.08 (175 libbre, 12 on); Benedetto di Filippo 98.05.08 (166 libbre 12 on); Francesco detto Naso: 216.07.04 (366 libbre); Lorenzo di Bardo Lanino 1036.08.04 (1797 libbre, 17 on); Pagolo Lanino 92.14.08 (154 libbre). Total earnings from wool in this year: 1709.04.08.

23. Brown and Goodman locate the collapse of the Florentine wool industry in the 1570s, while Richard Goldthwaite dates it to the 1610s. Brown and Goodman, "Women and Industry," 77. Goldthwaite, *Economy of Florence*, 278. In Francesco de'Medici's accounts, the figures are 21.2 and 11.83, respectively. De Roover, "Florentine Firm," 118. Goldthwaite confirms the 20 percent figure for spinning in wool. Goldthwaite, "Entrepreneurial Silk Weaver," 117.

24. ASF 112/29, 1v–7r. De Roover, "Florentine Firm," 98.

25. Leonardo Fioravanti, *Lo specchio di scientia universale . . .*(Venice: 1572), as cited in Mola, *Silk Industry,* xiii.

26. For the description of silk work that follows, see Edler de Roover, *Medieval Terms of Business,* 330. Also Edler de Roover, *L'arte della seta*. Mola, *Silk Industry*. Roberta Morelli, *La seta fiorentina*.

27. Tuscan sericulture increased by three-quarters from 1440 to 1576, then doubled in next twenty-five years, and increased by 2.5 times from 1610 to 1650. It became a major economic activity, with an average of 110,000 *libbre* produced annually. Brown, "Woman's Place," 220–21. Goldthwaite, *Economy of Florence,* 293–95.

28. For more on women and girls in sericulture and silk production elsewhere, see Li, *China's Silk Trade*, 18–33.

29. Brown, *Shadow of Florence,* 82–85. For Sismondi, see n. 65. With the Tuscan pound (libbre) equivalent to 0.34 kilograms, the girls' 1565 production of 1,200 libbre represented 408 kilograms of silk thread. At the 10 : 1 ratio for dried cocoons, producing this amount of silk thread would take 4,080 kilograms of cocoons. With cocoons weighing from 1.5 to 2.5 grams each, this would in turn be equivalent to between 1,632,000 and 2,720,000 cocoons. See also the calculations done in 1905 by Laurent de l'Arbousset, and reported in "Silk and Sericulture."

30. Poni, "All'origine del sistema di fabbrica," 444–45, 451–56. Martin, *Viaggio in Toscana,* fig. 44.

31. A pound of silk took a pound of specially prepared soap. Edler de Roover, *Arte della seta*, 43.

32. Giovanni Soldani: lire 637.00.00 (ASF CRSGF ms. 112/2, 93r, 96r; 112/29, 3r, 4r, 5v.). Baccio Comi: lire 1155.00.00 (112/2, 90r, 112/29, 3v, 5r.). Total earnings from silk in this year: 1792.00.00.

33. From 15 November 1565 through 21 March 1568, Comi passed on 1,264 libbre of silk for various operations: 35.85 percent was from Tuscan and north Italian towns (19.2% described as *nostrale*, 9.96% from Pietrasanta near the coast beyond Lucca and 6.68% from Reggio Emilia); 51.5% was from southern Italy (44.54% from Montalto in Calabria and 6.96% from Messina); and 10.04% was noted without origin. From 26 November through 5 March 1565 (sf), Soldani passed on 191 libbre: 56 percent was Tuscan or north Italian (29.8% from Reggio Emilia and 26.2% from Pietrasanta) and only 12 percent was from Montalto in Calabria; 31.9 percent had no declared origin. ASF CRSGF 112/2, 87r–88r, 93r. It is possible that south Italian silk came to the Pietà in the form of cocoons, since some of these accounts include payments for reeling. See also Morelli, *Seta fiorentina*, 34–35.

34. The figures are difficult to work out, but as an example, the Pietà reeled and spun 31 pounds 6 ounces for the workshop of Zanobi da Filicaia on 26 November 1565, for which it was paid 42 lire on 9 February 1566: ASF CRSGF ms. 112/2, 93r, 96r. Duke Cosimo I ordered new statutes, which were adopted in 1562: *Riforma attenente a l'Arte della Seta et università di Porta S. Maria della Citta di Fiorenza* (Fiorenza: i Giuinti, 1570).

35. Wool production had moved in the range of 15,000–20,000 cloths from 1460 to 1559, jumping to 30,000 cloths from 1560 to 1580 before collapsing to just over 13,000 cloths from 1580 to 1609, 6,000 by 1630 to 1649, and 3,500 from 1660 to 1669; the wool industry employed approximately 12,700 workers in the late sixteenth century and only 5,400 by 1665; in that latter year, the silk industry employed 15,100. Brown and Goodman, "Women and Industry," 76–77.

36. For what follows, see Brown and Goodman, "Women and Industry"; Franceschi, "Les enfants au travail"; Franceschi, "Florence and Silk"; Goldthwaite, *Economy of Florence*, 322–40; Goldthwaite, "Entrepreneurial Silk Weaver," Tommaso Spinelli," 417–39. Piergiovanni, "Technological Typologies," 543–64. Morelli, *La seta fiorentina*.

37. Morelli, *Seta fiorentina*, 63, 69. Goldthwaite differs slightly in the breakdown of labor costs but finds the same totals. *Economy of Florence*, 339.

38. Brown and Goodman argue that men moved into the expanding luxury trades, "Women and Industry," 79–80.

39. In 1590, the Tuscan industry produced 10,000 cloths with 12.5 percent of the raw materials coming from Tuscany. This engaged the labor of 1,560 women and children raising cocoons for the forty-five-day cycle of silkworms, 120 reelers working for one hundred days to unwind the cocoons, and 70 spinners working

seventy days to create thread. By 1650, 9,360 were raising cocoons, 740 reeling, and 420 spinning. Brown, "Women's Place," 220–24.

40. Of the 14,034 silk workers noted in a 1663 census, 2,252 (16%) were male and 11,782 (84%) were female. There were 6,084 (43%) children, and 4,775 (78%) of these were girls. These figures do not include apprentices. The number of adults working full time as weavers, dyers, or throwsters was 1,908, of which 1,459 (76%) were women. Brown and Goodman, "Women and Industry," 80.

41. Morelli, *Seta fiorentina*, 62. Goldthwaite, *Economy of Florence,* 322–26.

42. Paolo di Giorgio Ugi handles a contract with Baccio Comi in March 1566 (sf). The wives of jobber Francesco di Iacopo Barberino and of merchant Giovanni Soldani were members of the Compagnia della Pietà, as was Mona Ginevra de Tolomei, one of the women who also handled a contract from Soldani. ASF CRSGF 112/2, 90r, 96r; 112/29, 5r. Tolomei lived in S. Croce area, where most silk production takes place. See Caferro, "Tommaso Spinelli," 423.

43. Mola, *Silk Industry*, xiii.

44. The gray area here included outright donations. The Silk Guild began subsidizing the Pietà directly once it moved to via Mandorlo but at laughably low levels. It offered 25 lire annually and only increased this to 75 lire when it received a desperate appeal for help from the Pietà in 1604: ASF CRSGF 112/89, #17 (18-XI-1604).

45. So, for instance, in 1565–66 when both wool and silk produced earned roughly 1,700 lire for the Pietà, there were 102 separate payments from four wool jobbers, and twenty-seven payments from two silk merchants. ASF CRSGF 112/29, 1v–7r. The biggest single payment (700 lire) from Bacio Comi for *piu sete lavorate* came on 4 August 1565.

46. Edler de Roover notes that male silk weavers working full time produced around 300 braccia of time-consuming damasks per year, while women working part time could produce about the same quantity of low-end taffetas. Edler de Roover, *Arte della seta,* 54–56. The Pietà girls produced at least 2,000 braccia in 1565.

47. The Florentine braccio was 58.36 cm, or roughly 2 feet long, and was normally used for measuring cut lengths of cloth, while whole lengths were measured in *cannae* (one canna = 3–4 braccia). Edler de Roover, *Medieval Terms of Business,* 52. Through 1565, there are thirty-one sales that specify a length (totaling 1,383 braccia and earning sums that vary from 1s7d to 3s1d per braccio) and unspecified lengths that earned lire 71.01.00. Weaving generated a total of lire 163.11.04, and even at the very generous rate of 2s/braccio, this would be another 700 braccia, for a total of approximately 2,100 braccia. ASF CRSGF 112/29, 1v–6v, 129r–130r. Edler de Roover, *Arte della seta,* 54–56. Caferro notes the difficulty of determining wages from the way that accounts were typically kept. "Tommaso Spinelli," 428–29.

48. Production of twenty-four pieces of silk ribbon in 1559 earned lire 9.12: ASF CRSGF 112/55, 176r. There is only one twenty-four braccia length of combed silk in the accounts for 1565, and it earns lire 6.10, or 5s6d per braccio. This was in the range of 4s16d to 6s that women earned in their homes but was still significantly below the 7–10 soldi per braccio that professional weavers could earn in their workshops. Morelli, *Seta fiorentina*, 74–75. Goldthwaite, "Entrepreneurial Weaver", 82–84. Edler de Roover, *Arte della seta*, 54–55.

49. Edler de Roover, *Arte della seta,* 54–56. Caferro, "Tommaso Spinelli," 428.

50. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her,* 88–89.

51. ASF CRSGF 112/81, "*Manifatture di Tele e Pigionali 1554–79.*" *Pigionali* can also be translated as "rents," though in this ledger it represents the financial pledges that women in the Compagnia della Pietà made annually to support the home.

52. I am grateful to Nerida Newbigin for this characterization of the hand as "trained but unpracticed."

53. Pezzella, *Erbario inedito,* 112, 140, 300, 314–15, 318. The *ricetta per la tigna* and the two recipes for *diaqualons* are in ASF CRSGF 112/81, 63r–64v.

54. ASF CRSGF 112/81, 65r–v. Pezzella, *Erbario inedito,* 304, 314. *Dizionario etimologico storico,* 619. Johnston and Gaas, "Vinegar," 61ff.

55. Recipe #5 was good for burns. For *tutia*, see Florio, *Worlde of Wordes* (1598), 436.

56. Potter, "Greensickness in *Romeo and Juliet,*" 274–80. King, *The Disease of Virgins*. Green, *The Trotula,* 83–87. Park, *Secrets of Women*.

57. Soranus, *Gynecology.* 215–44. Dioscorides, *De material medica.*

58. Green claims correctly that *The Trotula* contains no explicit reference to abortifacients; yet, it does include a few pages of remedies aimed at triggering a difficult birth or expelling a dead fetus. This was one of the indirect means by which knowledge of the abortifacient effects of certain herbs was passed on (deliberately or not), and indeed the herbs prescribed in the Trotula include many of those which classical and Islamic authorities describe as abortifacients (e.g., bdellium, galbanum, linseed, mallow, myrrh, rue). Green, *The Trotula*, 34, 99–105, 123–24, 157–59.

Chapter 4. Teenage Girls and Birth Control

Epigraph. Act III, Scene 4, in *Five Comedies*, 92–93.

1. Green, *The Trotula.* Pomata, *Contracting a Cure.*

2. Cherubino's *Vitae matrimonialis regula* was likely published in 1487 in

Florence. Noonan, *Contraception,* 343. On fictional stereotypes, see van de Walle, "'Marvellous Secrets,'" 325. On the strong birth culture in Renaissance Italy, see Bell, *How to Do It,* 17–72.

3. Guainerius's *Treatise on the Womb* (*Tractatus de matricibus*) was published as part of his *Opera Omnia* in 1481. See Lemay, "Anthonius Guainerius," 327, 334. The hydatidiform mole is a tumorous growth that can develop from a fertilized egg or independently. Symptoms include abdominal swelling, nausea, and vaginal bleeding, and failure to remove the mole can result in infections, bleeding, and toxemia.

4. Niccoli, *Prophecy and People.*

5. Aristotle discusses the differentiation of the fetus in the *History of Animals*, Bk. VII, 3.

6. Thomas Aquinas, *In libros sententiarum*, cited in Noonan, *Contraception,* 234.

7. Bernardine, *De evangelio aeterno* in his *Opera,* vol. IV, 33.2.7, cited in Noonan, *Contraception*, 218. See Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons*.

8. Antoninus, *Summula confessionalis utilissima*, 95–96. Howard, *Beyond the Written Word.*

9. Savonarola, *Confessionale,* 34–35.

10. Cajetan, *Summula de peccatis*, 1. Sanchez, *De sancto matrimonii,* II, 22.17, 130, 198–99. Noonan, *Contraception*, 89–91, 368–69.

11. A review of published legal codes ranging from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries for thirty-nine cities and towns across Italy turned up only two references (for Viterbo 1469 and Vallerano 1534). This will be discussed further by John Christopoulos in his forthcoming dissertation on abortion in the Renaissance.

12. Sixtus V, *Effaenatam*, 29 October 1588, in *Codicis iuris canonici fontes*, ed. Gasparri, I, 308. The translation here is from Trimakas, "The *Effraenatam,*" http://iteadjmj.com/aborto/eng-prn.html.

13. Ibid., 309–310. On Sixtus V's particular focus on clergy, see Noonan, *Contraception*, 344, 362–65.

14. Gregory XIV, *Sedes Apostolica, 31 maii 1591,* in Gasparri, ed. *Codicis iuris canonici fontes*, vol. 1, 330–31.

15. Pius IX removed the distinction between the fetus *animatus* and *inanimatus* in 1869, and Leo XIII prohibited all abortion regardless of stage or motivation in 1886. Noonan, *Contraception,* 405. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion,* 162.

16. Noonan, *Contraception*, 346–58. Noonan unfortunately discusses contraception and abortion largely in the context of marital intercourse, although presumably the motivations for controlling births would have been far greater on

the part of those who were having sex outside of marriage (adultery, concubinage, assault, premarital intercourse, etc.). On clerical sex, see Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society,* 214–23, 251–52, 342–43, 401–4, 536–39. In late medieval York, clergymen far outnumbered laity in charges of adultery and fornication prosecuted in the Capitular court from 1358 to 1495. Goldberg, "Pigs and Prostitutes," 174–76.

17. In Session 24, the Council determined that a priest keeping a concubine would be given three warnings, after which he would be excommunicated. Hufton, *Prospect Before Her*, 276.

18. Laven, *Virgins of Venice.* 167–85. McGough, "Quarantining Beauty," 227–28.

19. Laven, *Virgins of Venice,* 158–85. Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic,* 124–27, 142–48.

20. The story dates to 1513–16. Bandello, *Terza parte.* III, #52, 238–39. Van de Walle, "Marvellous Secrets," 325.

21. The case was prosecuted before the secular *Provveditori sopra i monasteri di monache* in 1609. Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, 163–64, 241.

22. In March 1558 (sf), Luca Fabbioni wrote to the Captains of the Parte Guelfa denouncing two Franciscans of S. Iacopo sopra Arno. This was a house of "Zoccoli," reputedly the poorest and most pious group in the Order. The friars went to an Orbatello apartment where two widows lived, Pulisena (40 years) and Mathea (35 years), and when one of the couples began making out, the group was caught and denounced by another widow living on floor above. Fabbioni complained that it was not the first time that friars had been doing this at the Orbatello, including some from house of S. Piero del Murone, and he added that there was an active exchange of amorous letters between friars and some of the women who knew how to read and write. ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, Numeri Neri, 707 "Suppliche del 1559," #104 (11 March 1558—sf). Likewise in 1560, two men of the town of Marradi were charged with assaulting a local priest, whom locals described as a *ribaldo*, after he had impregnated the cousin of one of the defendants. ASF, OGBP, ms. 2235, #346 (18 July 1560).

23. Sercambi, *Novelle.* II, 518–25. Kunstmann, *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, 47–50. Cited in van de Walle "Marvellous Secrets," 324.

24. Van de Walle reminds us that of the three forms of handling unwanted pregnancies—contraception, abortion, or concealment—renaissance *novelle* overwhelmingly favored concealment, and often showed it as the option that characters chose after deliberately rejecting the other two. Interesting too that Spanish and German tales seldom dealt with this, while Italian and French did. Van de Walle, "Marvellous Secrets," 321–22, 329.

25. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion*, 144–57.

26. Lemay, "Medieval Gynecology," 323.

27. The *cerusaco* (*chirurgo*, or surgeon) Maestro Simone earned 14 lire annually paid in two installments, while the *medicho fisicho* (physician) Francesco Ruggieri earned a little more than double that: 29 lire annually (plus the cost of any medications) paid in three installments. ASF CRSGF ms. 112/29 126r, 128v, 130r, 132v, 133v, 135v, 137r, 140r, 143v, 150v, 151v, 161r.

28. Bonnacioli, *Muliebrium libri II* in *Gynaeciorum*, 577–94. On bleeding, 578–81, 586. Doctors also feared that in a patient without normal flows, the menstrual blood was heading to the brain, where it could cause lunacy. Bleeding from the foot during the waxing moon relieved this threat. Hufton, *Prospect before Her*. 44.

29. Pomata, *Contracting a Cure*, 22. Rösslin, *Rose Garden*, 67–93.

30. See Salernitano, *Il Novellino*. 170. Van de Walle disagrees with this reading. "Marvellous Secrets," 326.

31. *Raccolta di Ricette medicinale da diversi autori copiata da una che era in S. Maria Nuova*. BNCF Magliabecchi XV.92. The 192 folio manuscript is dated 17 October 1515, and scribe Hectore di Lionello di Francesco Baldovinetti Baldivonetti describes it as "uno libro universale di piu cose avete riciette isperimentate e provate aute . . . cavate pure di sancta maria nuova." The table of contents is the first nineteen pages and includes frequent repetition and no particular order, which may indicate that Baldivonetti was simply pulling books off the shelf as he copied. Among the authorities he cites are Ficino, Fruosino, Michele da Pescia, Francesco Ghamberai, Antonio degl'Agli, Jacopo di Monte, Giovanni Cierretani, and Dino del Garbo. The toothpaste is on fol. 37v. Many older medical texts juxtaposed remedies in this way. See Green, *The* Trotula.

32. For an extended discussion of the contents of Dr. Pagholo's *Raccolta*, see Henderson, *Renaissance Hospital*, 297–335. Henderson considers the *Raccolta* to be the official *Ricettario* of S. Maria Nuova, but the juxtaposition of recipes and frequent references to texts held in the hospital library make it more like the numerous individualized collections commissioned by doctors for their personal use and described by Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing*, 57, 109–12. See also Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*. For other examples of such personalized collections, see BNCF Magliabecchi XV (particularly mss 111–18).

33. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion*, 127–34.

34. ASF, Arte dei Medici e Speziali, ms. 4, 43r–44v, 53r–55v.

35. In a two-month period (14 April through 19 June 1562), the Pietà paid 98 lire for medicinal items (*robe medicinale* or *piu medicine*), though these were not itemized. ASF CRSGF 112/28, 97r. Medications cost over 130 lire in 1566 and over 220 in 1567, but dropped to only 7 lire in 1570 and just over 4 lire in each of the two years following. From 7 July 1569 through 29 May 1574, the Pietà paid a

total of 42.0.8 lire for medications: ASF CRSGF 112/29, 154v, 178v, 184r, 185r, 187r, 191r, 193r, 210r, 225v, 230r, 239v. See also ms. 112/57, 30r–v.

36. Lemay, "Medieval Gynecology," 326.

37. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion*; *Eve's Herbs*. Private correspondence.

38. Davis, "Scandale à l'Hôtel-Dieu," 181–85.

39. The regulation appears in the 1577 statutes: ASF Onestà ms. 3, 18r.

40. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Carnesecchi (n.p.), cases of 1560 and 1561.

41. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Onesta (n.p.), case of June 1562.

42. If it wasn't religious fervor, then Giovanni may also have been inspired by the classical story of the Dream of Hecuba. While pregnant with Paris, Queen Hecuba of Troy dreams that she will give birth to a firebrand who will set the entire city ablaze. Her husband King Priam responds by exposing baby Paris, who nonetheless survives to fulfill the dream. Giulio Romano painted a version of Hecuba's Dream for the Palazzo del Te in Mantua, which, in an eerie recollection of the San Gimigniano fresco, shows a devil behind the reclining and naked Hecuba while a lit torch extends from her vagina.

43. Girolamo (1490–1561) served in many prominent positions, including magistracies dealing with the law and justice systems (and even including the Onestà), charity and food provisioning, and the ducal bureaucracy. Through the latter half of the 1550s, he served almost continually as a member of the Magistrato Supremo, the duke's privy council and the highest body of government. ASF Raccolta Sebregondi ms. 5004. He made out the will 2 November 1559 and died 21 May 1561. For the will and inventory, see ASF*, Libri di commercio e di famiglia,* ms. 4788. For the condemnation of Giovanni, see ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Carnesechi (n.p.), case of 1559.

44. www.operaduomo.firenze.it/battesimi.

45. From 1531 to 1539, abandonments at the Innocenti were equivalent to 21.9 percent of Florentine baptisms, with 38.9 percent in 1539 alone. Between 1548 and 1552, abandonments ranged from 20.9 percent to 37.3 percent of baptisms. In absolute numbers, they rose from 417 in 1547 to 884 in 1551 before dropping down to 607 in 1552. Gavitt, "Charity and State Building," 238–39, n. 29, 246.

46. Brackett, *Criminal Justice,* 110.

47. The S. Maria Vergine registry for the first four years includes eighty-five girls, of whom twenty-eight went out as servants. Nineteen of these subsequently returned, while 7 fled. ASF Ceppo ms. 145, 171–87. S. Niccolò had 57 girls in 1571, adding a further 35 by 1579: of these 92, 39 left as servants, two-thirds of them from non-Florentine families. The records then deteriorate, but it appears that from 1579 to 1598, a further 113 girls enter and of these 26 go out as servants. The registers are not clear on how many, if any, return. ASF Ceppo ms. 59, 105v–118v,

128v–182r. Of the 60 Pietà servant girls for whom we can trace origins, 23 came from Florence and 37 from outside the city. ASF CRSGF 112/78 and 79.

48. For the registered prostitutes, see the facsimile of the 1562 census: Trkulja, *I Fiorentini nel 1562*, xx, 68v, 69. According to the census *ricerca*, the seventy-seven households on Via Nuova had 155 men and 193 women; the eleven households on Chiasso di Codarimessa had 6 men and 24 women, and the five in Piazza S. Paolo had 10 men and 10 women. ASF Decima Granducale, ms. 3782, 25v–27r, 37v–39v, 427r–455v, 637r–663r–681v.

49. "La Vescovina" was Lisabettia Baccianti, and she appeared before the Onestà in 1562 accused of having hired a young girl as a servant. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Onestà, n.p. (1562).

50. The Cathedral Chapter and the Franciscan friars of Ognissanti owned twenty-one of the seventy-seven properties on Via Nuova, eight of the eleven on Codarimessa, and all five of those on Piazza S. Paolo. See n. 49.

51. van de Walle, "Marvellous Secrets," 326. Aretino, *Dialogues*, 126, 208.

52. *El ricettario*. This volume was based on Florence's first official *ricettario*, which had been produced in 1499 and which set out the approved recipes for all licensed pharmacies in the city. Henderson, *Renaissance Hospital*, 297.

53. Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles recreations et joyeux devis*, cited in van de Walle, who makes the distinction between Italian and French literature on this point. "Marvellous Secrets," 324.

54. Following the description above, these are manuscripts 81, 97, and 56, respectively, in the Pietà deposit. ASF CRSGF 112/56, 61v–72r; 112/81, 4r–17v; 112/97, 1r–83r.

55. The new form of naming was in response to ducal measures that aimed to distinguish senatorial from lower-level elite families. Some of the women of the Compagnia della Pietà used their natal families and some their marital families. ASF CRSGF ms. 112/56, ms. 112/81, ms. 112/97. On short-lived women's associations, see Strocchia, "Sisters in Spirit," 735–67. Eckstein, "The Widows' Might," 99–118.

56. Manno Tolu, "Echi Savonaroliani," 209–24.

Chapter 5. Renaissance Fundamentalists and Girls in Trouble

Epigraph. Grazzini, *La pinzochera*, Act III, Scene 1, 2, 3 in D'Orazio, "Antonfrancesco Grazzini," 150–53.

1. See "The Book on the Life of the Widow," in Savonarola, *Guide to Righteous Living*, 191–226.

2. Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*. Martines, *Fire in the City*. Eisenbichler, "Savonarola Studies," 487–95.

3. Polizzotto, “When Saints Fall Out,” 486–95. Herzig, *Savonarola’s Women.* See particularly ch. 5.

4. For what follows, see Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*. S Dall’Aglio, *Savonarola*. Martines, *Fire in the City*. Najemy, *History of Florence*.

5. Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*, 322, 334–86.

6. On efforts by the friars of S. Marco to exert control over four other convents, see efforts that escalated through the sixteenth century, Lorenzo Polizzotto, “When Saints Fall Out,” 522–23. Strocchia, “Savonarolan Witnesses,” 393–418.

7. Merging the three extant lists for the Compagnia della Pieta gives a master list of 385 names; of these, 162 have family names that are found on the 1497 petition. ASF CRSGF 112/56, 112/81, 112/97. L. Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*, 446–60.

8. ASF Acquisti e Doni 291, Onestà (n.p.), case of June 1562.

9. All were widows of minor cadet branches of the family: Andreiuola was the widow of Giovanni Francesco di Orlando de Medici and Maddalena the widow of Francesco de Medici; Francesca was also identified as a widow. CRSGF 112/81, 20v, 41v.

10. Manno Tolu, “Echi Savonaroliani,” 218–22. Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*, 366, 385. Guasti, *Lettere di S. Caterina de’ Ricci.* 301. ASF Bigallo 1669/IV, 200r; ASF te 725, 59r. Marietta Gondi’s will: ASF 112/92 (25-II-1569 sf). The Vespucci family, which had founded and sponsored the S. Maria dell’Umiltà hospital, also had a member in the Company of Compassion. Andrea di Vespucci honored her 1 florin annual pledge through the period that records remain. ASF CRSGF 112/97 #200, 34r, 57r, 76r.

11. Two sources note memberships: ASF CRSGF 112/97, 1r–83r (memberships recorded from 28-XII-1554 through 17-XII-1558). See also ASF CRSGF 112/81, where recording begins with Marietta Gondi on 10 September 1554. Pledges were usually only a few florins; only 18 of the first 270 donors gave more than a scudo, and most of the rest gave 1.5 lire or 2.10. In 1557, the *limosine dalle donne* generated 803.15 lire (7.6% total income) and in 1558, 589.16.08 lire (5.4%). ASF CRSGF 112/55, 25r, 108r. See also Manno Tolu, “Abbandonate Fiorentine,” and “Echi Savonaroliani,” 218–23. The only male member was Friar Giovan Maria, a Franciscan from S. Croce.

12. On 5-VII-1555, five women (Marietta Gondi, Margerita Bonsi, Alessandra Mazzinosi, Marietta Strozzi, and Maria del Pugliase) intervened with alms of 70 to 75 lire, and one man (Niccolo Doni) with 35 lire to meet an urgent but unspecified need. ASF CRSGF 112/97, 4r–55v. The Pietà received a small government subsidy, in the form of alms of salt, from 1557. Manno Tolu, “Echi Savonaroliani,” 210.

13. BRF Moreni, AD 93, p. 2.

14. Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, 222–41.

15. This was the argument made explicitly by a parallel Bolognese home some years later. Ferrante, "Honor Regained," 56–57, 62–64.

16. The 1570 statutes explicitly cut out an activity that seemed to bring together those girls holding responsibility in the home (as overseers or staff) in a combination of worship and mutual correction: "We ordain that all the officials must attend each to their own offices, not doing them together with a Bible since from this comes much scandal, but when some defect arises refer it to the Madre [Priora] and the Master (i.e., the Chaplain]. . . " ['l'ordiniamo che tutti le ofitiali atendiro ognuna alli loro hofitij non facendo insieme con bibbia per chasa che ne viene di molto schandolo ma quando acadesse qualche difecto referirlo alla madre e maestro. . .]." BRM Fondo Bigazzi, ms. 61, 8r–v.

17. Savonarola, "Book on the Life of the Widow," 209–11.

18. So, for instance, Friar Girolamo Finugi is only identified as Friar Girolamo Capucino, and *The Chronicles'* readers would not know that he later became provincial of the Capuchin's Tuscan province, was a delegate at the Council of Trent, taught theology as a professor in Rome, and was a theologian in the service of Pope Pius V. Manno Tolu, "Echi Savonaroliani," 211–12, nn. 14–15. The *Chronicles* also misidentified a later spiritual director Francesco Franceschini as a secular priest when in fact he was a Camaldolese monk. Terpstra, "Confraternities and Mendicant Orders," 10–13, 15–21. On the Jesuits and Savonarola, see dall'Aglio, *Savonarola e il savonarolismo*, 172ff.

19. ASF Bigallo 154, 233. For Bigallo payments to Ginori's shelter, see ASF Bigallo 1679, 57r. Ginori's original shelter was the former hospital of S. Niccolò dei Fantoni on Piazza S. Felice, under the care of the Bigallo magistracy. Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, 223–25.

20. The Pietà was designated "Spedale delle Abbandonate in borgo ognissancti." The other two shelters had slightly less generic names: S. Niccolò was called "S. Niccolò delle abbandonate" and S. Maria Vergine "L'Abbandonate della via di S. Piero Gattolini." Trkulja, *I Fiorentini*. 3v, 13, 69.

21. ASF CRSGF 112/97, 13v, 14v, 57r, 74r. We do not have a list of all of Ginori's supporters and collaborators, but two that we do know of—Alessandra di Paradiso Mazzinghi and Margherita Bonisegnio—were among the first donors to the Pietà. ASF Bigallo, 154, 161r. ASF CRSGF 112/97, 1v.

22. Marchi, *Vita di Alessandro Capocchi*. Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation*, 438–45. dall'Aglio, *Savonarola,* 182. d'Addario, "Noti di storia della religiosità," 100–101. Among those rewriting the Savonarolan story was Friar Marco di Francesco della Casa, whose mother Bitia was a member of the Compagnia della Pietà. ASF CRSGF 112/97, #145.

23. BRF, Moreni, AD 93, 193r–194v. S. Giovannino was the Jesuits' first home in Florence. Aranci, *Formazione religiosa*, 140–45.

24. A friar writing in the Chronicle described the women's administration as "without any order" (*sanza ordine alcuna*). BRF, Moreni, AD 93, pp. 4–10, 13. Manno Tolu believes that the Compagnia della Pietà had statutes from its inception, but (as she also acknowledges) there is no record of these remaining. "Echi Savonaroliani," 215.

25. "non possone piu persevare nello abitazione senza somma pernicie, e danno d'esse . . . e cavare dette povere Fanciulle di tanto pernicioso luogo" (they cannot remain any longer in the place without the greatest danger . . . [buying a new place will allow the Pietà to] draw these poor girls from such a pernicious place." Letter of 18 October 1561 from the Compagnia della Pietà to Duke Cosimo I, as cited in BRM, Moreni, AD 93, p.5.

26. McGough, "Quarantining Beauty," 231–32.

27. Caterina del Cavaliere Rosso joined 13 October 1554 as the seventy-ninth member of the Compagnia. ASF CRSGF 112/81, 6v; 112/97, 14r, 55r. She was no longer a member in 1567, but a Camilla Rosso joined in 1563. ASF CRSGF 112/56, 64v, #13.

28. Girolamo da Sommaia was also of *piagnone* stock, the son of Francesco da Sommaia who had signed the 1497 petition to Pope Alexander VI. ASF 112/88, cc. 1v, 4v. The site on Piazza S. Marco was the Ospedale of S. Iacopo de Preti, which was being used by textile workers who were willing to trade it for the da Sommaia house on via Palazzuolo. Negotiations and some of the letters sent by the women are in the BRF Moreni, AD 93, pp. 10–17, 197r–197v. Macey, "*Infiamma il mio core*," 164–65.

29. Lucia di Marco da Lecore (#332), Betta di Batista materassaio (#333), Daamante di Giovanni Battista di Romagna (#334). Domenica di Marco da Firenze arrived 23 November 1568 and died 31 January 1569 (n.s.): CRSGF 112/79, 56r. The cemetery and church were consecrated 2 November 1568 under the title of S. Maria della Gratia: ASF CRSGF 112/89, #3.

30. For the volume of *Ricordanze* and Franceschini as a Camaoldolese monk, see ASF CRSGF ms. 112/88, 4v; ms. 112/3, 27r–28v. BRF Moreni, AD 93, pp. 13–14. The Pietà does not record which Camaldolese house Franceschini came from, though it was likely S. Maria degli Angeli, a famous center of Florentine intellectual life located only three blocks south of Via Mandorlo. Both this house and the one of S. Felice in Piazza had come into trouble with the Camoldolese Prior General Pietro Dolfin in the 1490s because of their ardent support for Savonarola. Caby, *De lérémetisme rural.* 781–83. Capocchi became Padre Spirituale at S. Maria Vergine in 1580 and died a year later. D'Addario, "Noti di storia religiosa," 101.

31. "siera partito dal Governo di esse Abbandonate per che non haveva potuto ottenere un suo intento circa di esse." BRF Moreni, AD 93 p. 12, 192r–v, 194v.

32. This was S. Maria del Querceto (later known as S. Agata) on Via S. Gallo (with 112 nuns in the 1562 census). Trkulja, *I Fiorentini*, 108, 118v.

33. Gill, "*Scandala*," 177–203. Zarri, "The Third Status," 181–99. Cosimo I had already published the decrees of the Council of Trent in 1564.

34. AAF, Visite Pastorali, 9.1. Aranci, *Formazione religiosa*, 39–43. Two of the Pietà chronicle's authors differ in their accounts. The friar Giovan Battista Bracchesi claims that Altoviti ordered the move to the Dominicans after the Camaldolese friar Franceschini quit, while Friar Romano Felice Viccioni claims that the women and girls dismissed him a day after receiving assurances from Capocchi and the Dominican provincial that San Marco would be willing to provide a *padre confessore*. BRF, Moreni, AD 93, p. 15, 194v.

35. The Pietà had paid Capocchi's house of S. Maria Novella 15.05.00 lire monthly and Franceschi's Camaldolese house 10.03.10 lire monthly; the S. Marco Dominicans required 21 lire monthly and took only cash, unlike the Camaldolese who accepted food. ASF CRSGF 112/3, 2r, 3r, 4r, 5r, 27r–28r, 39v, 36v, 38r, 150r, 157r. 112/88, 4v. Strocchia, "Savonarolan Witnesses," 398–403. The friars of S. Marco followed the same pattern from 1507 when they took over the spiritual direction of the youth confraternity of the Purification and reshaped it into a Savonarolan group. Polizzotto, *Children of the Promise*, 137–46.

36. Most confraternity and institutional statutes name the company members who authored them and give the date when the company accepted them formally; these say nothing of authorship or approval. They are largely conventional, except for the second chapter "On Life and Good Habits," which reads like a random set of rules that came to the author's mind and were written down in no particular order, save as responses to problems that have happened in the past. BRM, Fondo Bigazzi, 61, 6v–14v.

37. BRM, Fondo Bigazzi, 61, 9r.

38. BRM, ms. 61, 31v–33r (mistress of novices), 45v–48v (behavior). Head called the *madre generale*, 25r–27r.

39. Gondi left the Pietà as her universal heir, with the sole provision that her two female servants receive 4 gold florins annually for as long as they remained with the conservatory: ASF CRSGF 112/92 (25 February 1569 sf). The chronicle gives two dates in two separate places for the first vesting, with the other being the day of the Assumption of the Virgin (August 15): BRF Moreni, AD 93, 193r. See also: Polizzotto, *Children of the Promise*, 137–46.

40. ASF 112/57, 208rv, 264rv.

41. Expenses in 1574–75 totaled 26,243 lire while income was only 16,584. The surplus the following year was 2,600 lire on a budget of 21,282 lire, and expenses were cut further to 12,895 by 1577–78. This is the last year for which

there are clear records, so it is not clear whether the deep cuts continued. ASF CRSGF 112/87, 182rv, 208rv, 264rv, 307rv.

42. ASF CRSGF 112/79. Following Camilla di Andrea (42r, #248), 18 girls left in the 1570s and 2 in the 1580s, with the last being Lisabetta di Battista da S. Maria in Bagno (76r, #462).

43. BRM Fondo Bigazzi, 61, 45v–48v.

44. Income from work as derived from accounts in ASF CRSGF ms. 112/57 (in *lire*): 1573: 11,169.05.00 (182r–v); 1574–75: 4,643.12.04 (208r–v); 1576: 10,289.08.11 (264r–v); 1577: 5,9995.03.06 (307r–v); 1578: 4,993.01.00 (330r–v). There are no extant account books for subsequent years. For a table that compares percentages across different institutions and years, see Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, Appendix.

45. Alms generated 36 percent of income in the late 1560s and 20 percent by the late 1570s. ASF CRSGF 112/57, 142r–v, 182r, 208r, 264r, 307r. In the statutes BRM Bigazzi ms. 61, fols. 24v–25r, 42v–45r.

46. Of the 397 girls who entered the Pietà from the first sponsorship (20 June 1566) till the end of the register (29 April 1623), 372 were sponsored (230 by females and 142 by males); there were 303 individual sponsors. Of 52 clerical sponsors, 45 were regulars, 6 seculars, and 1 unclear. ASF CRSGF 112/79, 52r–119v. Gondi's sponsored child (#314: 3 June 1567) Grand Duchess Christine's (#599: 19 August 1596). Maddalena Costanza di Giovanni da Sommaia sponsored Lessandra di Giovanni Cappellai, who entered at age ten, became a tertiary, and never left (#485: 8 March 1580). The two individuals who brought in the largest number were both members of the Compagnia della Pietà: Maria Margherita, wife of Bartolomeo Filippo (11), and Simona, wife of Mario Larione Martelli (8): ASF CRSGF 112/56, 68v, 76r.

47. The agencies were the Magistracy of the Pupilli and the Buonomini di San Martino. Both sponsored five Pietà girls from 1574 to 1588 (ASF CRSGF ms. 112/79, #415, 419, 477, 478, 546), at which point they convinced Grand Duke Francesco I to pressure the newly opened Casa della Carità to take in the more girls that they would subsidize. Terpstra, "Mothers, Sisters, Daughters," 222–23.

48. On 7 April 1571, Jacopo Soldani took over from surgeon Simone and medico Francesco Ruggieri as the sole doctor on retainer ("nostro medico, cerasio e fisicho") for a salary of 43 lire annually (i.e., 6 scudi): ASF CRSGF 112/29, 198r. The first reference in Pietà records to "Fra Antonio infermiere" is 21 April 1571. ASF CRSGF 112/79, 63r (#374).

49. ASF CRSGF 112/28, 97r. From 7 July 1569 through 29 May 1574, the Pietà paid 42.0.8 lire. ASF CRSGF 112/29 Entrate-Uscità 1564–74, 154v, 178v, 184r, 185r, 187r, 191r, 193r, 210r, 225v, 230r, 239v. See also ms. 112/57, 30r–v for

former apothecary Vincenzo Pieroni and his replacements. The largest purchases at Via Mandorlo were for sugar and honey to make syrups, and for the barley water tonic called *aqua bora*. See also 112/57, 30r–v. These syrups and tonics were a common part of contemporary medicine, and that Friar Antonio used only them may indicate that the girls' health problems had eased significantly since the move from Borgo Ognissanti.

50. In the ASF archival deposit for the Pietà (CRSGF 112), these are, respectively, manuscripts 1–3, 27–31, 55–57, and 103–4.

51. Between 1554 and 1564, the Pietà purchased ten matching vellum-bound volumes for various accounts, identified these alphabetically (A=CRSGF 112/97; B=112/96; C=112/55; E=112/95, H =112/2, etc.), and kept them systematically: ASF CRSGF 112/95, 160r–v. By the mid-1570s, some accounts were being kept on the spare pages of books initially dedicated to other purposes (e.g., 112/81, which begins as a record of cloth piecework and ends up as a miscellaneous record book).

52. Some examples: ASF CRSGF 112/88, 1r [1566]; 112/95, 112/96 [1562–65 and 1556–63]; and 112/97 (the first matriculation and pledge book of the "*donne della società dello hospitale della pietà*"). BRF Moreni, AD 93, pp. 6–9.

53. For authorship of the chronicle, see Terpstra, "Mothers, Sisters, Daughters," 212, n. 34.

54. BRF Moreni, AD 93, 199r–201r.

55. Strocchia, "Savonarolan Witnesses," 403–18.

56. The *Libro Nuovo* is no longer extant, but ASF CRSGF 112/79 notes which names were transferred. BRF Moreni, AD 93, pp. 27–28. The chronicle fails to mention the election of a Priora Generale after 1625 (Signora Maria Biffoli) and last notes a Priora Generale in 1633 (Sig.a Maria Maddalena Nobili). The building was later restructured and currently serves as the Kunsthistorisches Institut. Micali and Roselli, *Le soppressioni dei conventi*, 83–84.

Chapter 6. Virgin Girls and Venereal Disease

Epigraph. Clowes, *Short and Profitable Treatise*, ch. 2 (n.p.). In the 1596 edition, Clowes clarified that the twelve-year-old girl was unable "by reason of debility" to have had sex. *A Briefe and Necessary Treatise*, 151.

1. Fracastoro, of course, went on to formulate more sophisticated theories of contagion in his 1546 work on contagion. Fracastoro, *De contagione*. Nutton, "Fracastoro's Theory of Contagion," 196–234.

2. de Vigo, *Most Excellent Workes*, fols. 160–61. Gale credits Doctor Cunyngham with the term "chameleontiasis." Gale, *Certaine workes*, 30. See also Foa, "The New and the Old," 26–45. Arrizabalaga, "Medical Responses," 211–12.

3. Rositinio, *Trattato del mal francese*, 21v, 24r–v. Clowes, *A Brief and Necessary Treatise*, 151–55. Clowes incorporates passages from *De Morbo Gallico* (1502) by the Spanish doctor Juan Almenar. Major, *Classic Descriptions*, 18. Eamon, "Cannibalism and Contagion," 1–31. McGough, "Quarantining Beauty," 211–12. I am grateful to John Christopoulos for his work in tracing the correspondences between the Pietà recipes and the medical authorities cited in the pages that follow.

4. This was Juan Almenar in his 1502 *De Morbo Gallico*. Jacques de Béthencourt writing in 1527 also claimed that pious people doing charitable work with the poor could pick it up in the air this way. Major, *Classic Descriptions*, 17, 20–21.

5. The English were far more judgmental than either the Italians or the Spanish. Relying heavily on English sources leads some authors to imagine that sufferers were universally condemned as immoral, though this was not the case. See, for example, Allen, *The Wages of Sin*, 41–60. For a broader discussion, Schleiner, "Moral Attitudes towards Syphilis," 389–410.

6. Vigo, "Of the French Pockes," *Chirurgerye*, 160–61. Major, *Classic Descriptions*, 24–27. Quétel, *History of Syphilis*, 26, 31, 34, 323.

7. Vigo, "Of Ulcers," *Chirurgerye*, 118r, 121v–122v, 125r–v, 128r.

8. Vigo, "Of the French Pockes," *Chirurgerye*, 161r. Major, *Classic Descriptions*, 27.

9. ASF, Spedale di SS. ma Trinità, detto degli Incurabili, ms. 1., pp. 29–32. These practices were formally adopted in reforms of 1574; the 1521 statutes deal only with administration (pp. 4–19) while the reforms of 1574 say more about treatment (from pp. 21–38). There was a second set of reforms in 1645 (pp. 39–56). Arrizabalaga, et al., *The Great Pox*, 145–68, 187–201.

10. Vigo, "Of Symples," *Chirurgerye*, 184v.

11. Vigo, "Of Symples," *Chirurgerye*, 185r–86v; 194r, 197v.

12. Vigo, "Of Symples," *Chirurgerye*, 185v, 190r, 193v, 195v.

13. Gale, "Antidotarie," in *Certaine Workes*. 2r.

14. Gale. *Certaine Works*. 3v–6r.

15. Paré, "Of Simple Medicines, and Their Use," in *Collected Works*, 1040.

16. Paré, "Of Simple Medicines," *Collected Works*, 1041–43. "Of the Lues Venerea and Those Symptoms Which Happen by Means Thereof," *Collected Works*, 728–37.

17. Rositinio, *Trattato di mal Francese*, 55r. Massa, *Libro del male Francese*, 309–10.

18. Paré, "Of Simple Medicines," *Collected Works*, 1040, 1046. Vigo, "The Antidotarie," *Chirurgerye,* 206v. Gale, *Certaine Workes*, 18r–v. The third recipe for an unguent "secondo Guido" is quite similar, appearing in both Vigo and Gale though without specific recommendations for use. Gale, *Certaine Workes*. fol.

18v. The "Guido" is most likely the Montepellier professor Guidonis Chauliaco (Guy de Chauliac), though it does not appear in this exact form in his major work, the *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*.

19. Avicenna, *Liber canonis* bk. V, suma I, Tract. XI, p. 533r–v. It is also cited by Avicenna's contemporary Mesue. Ioannis Mesue, *De re medica, libri tres* (Paris: 1552), edited with commentary by Jacques Dubois, 313. Mercuriale also recommended it for scrofules in *De puerorum morbis*, 50.

20. Vigo, "Of Ulceres," *Chirurgerye*, 141v. Vigo adapts the recipe slightly in his antidotary: Vigo, "The Antidotarie," *Chirurgerye*, 206v. Gale, *Certaine Workes*, 17v. Paré, "Of Simple Medicines," *Collected Works*, 1046, 1057.

21. Rositinio, *Trattato di mal Francese*, 60–62. Massa, *Libro di mal Francese*, 309–10.

22. Avicenna, *Canon*, Book V, suma I, tract. Xi (page 533, rect. vers.). Mesue notes that it is good against phlegmatic ulcers. Mesue, *De re medica*, 316.

23. Vigo, "The Antidotarie," *Chirurgerye*, 209v, 256r. Gale, *Certaine Workes*, 12 v.

Paré, "Of Tumors against Nature in Generall," *Collected Works,* 258; "Of simple Medicines, and their Use," *Collected Works,* 1041. Massa, *Libro di mal Francese*, 309–10.

24. Mesue, *De re medica*, 327.

25. Vigo, "Of Ulcers," *Chirurgerye*, 66r. Gale, *Certaine Workes*, 40v–42r. Paré, "Of Tumors against Nature in Generall," 258; "Of Simple Medicines," *Collected Works*, 1041, 1061. Massa, *Libro di mal Francese*, 309–10. Francanzano, *De morbo Gallico*, 14v–15v.

26. Mercuriale, *Tractatus varii*. "De puerorum morbis" is the third book in the volume (pp. 50–51, 58). Paré, "Of Tumors against Nature in Generall," *Collected Works,* 274–275. The connection of scrofula and syphilis was hotly debated through the nineteenth century. Diday, *A Treatise on Syphilis*, 119–24.

27. Vigo, "Of Ulcers," *Chirurgerye*, 129v–130v.

28. Mills et al., "Elder (Sambucas nigra L.)."

29. Paré, "Of the Lues Venerea," *Collected Works*, 754–55. In the same vein, Clowes did not recommend that one of his remedies, bleeding, be used on children under fourteen as their constitutions were too delicate for it. Clowes, *Sort and Profitable Treatise*, ch. 4 (n.p.).

30. Paré, "Concerning the *Lues Venerea*," *Collected Works*, 754–55. Clowes, *A briefe and necessary treatise*, 151–52.

31. See McMillan et al., *Clinical Practice*, 429–32; Hutchinson and Hook, "Syphilis in Adults," 1389–1416. Holmes et al., *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 363–67. For diagnoses and treatments in the period before penicillin, see also Diday, *Syphilis in New-Born Children*, 104–24, 133–39. Sweidaur, *Complete*

Treatise, 328. Pusey, *Syphilis as a Modern Problem*, 61–73. Dennie and Pakula, *Congenital Syphilis*, 420–29, 562–65. Stokes et al., *Modern Clinical Syphilology*, 1068–69. Quétel, *History of Syphilis*. Arrizabalaga, *Great Pox*, 234–51.

32. This fog continued into the twentieth century, with serious disagreements between medical authors on the symptoms, timing, and mortality patterns of those born with what was called “inherited syphilis.” Diday, *Syphilis in New-Born Children*, 104–24. Stokes et al., *Modern Clinical Syphilology*, 1112–15. Dennie and Pakula noted that it was “slow vascular degeneration [that] finally undermines the entire organism and results in the comparatively short life of the congenital syphilitic.” *Congenital Syphilis*, 423. On comparisons with leprosy, see Hammond, “Contagion, Honour and Urban Life,” 100–103.

33. Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 124–35.

34. Paré, “Of the *Lues Venerea*,” *Collected Works*, 725.

35. Meel, “The Myth of Child Rape,” 85–88. Pitcher and Bowley, “Infant Rape,” 319–20. Pitcher and Bowley’s assertion that the “virgin cure” lay behind a significant number of rapes was challenged by Jewkes, Martin, and Penn-Kekana, “The virgin cleansing myth,” 711. Pitcher and Bowley subsequently responded with “Motivation behind infant rape,” 1352. Here they noted that in sexual health workshops led by health professionals, 32.7 percent of participants had believed in the “virgin cure” for HIV: after fourteen workshops of two to three hours each, 20 percent still believed in it. The virgin cure has also been cited as a factor in the greater vulnerability of young prostitutes recruited in Nepal for work in Indian brothels. Silverman et al., “HIV Prevalence,” 536–42.

36. Cited in Schleiner, “Infection and cure,” 508–9.

37. Schleiner, “Infection and Cure,” 508. Schleiner offers a nuanced discussion of what Sassonia may have meant when describing the reports as “true.”

38. Lowe, “Stereotyping of Black Africans,” 29–32. Prostitution was one of the most common occupations for black women in contemporary London. Habib, *Black Lives*, 105–8, 157. Medical authorities debated into the nineteenth century about whether syphilis and gonorrhea were two distinct diseases or simply different forms of a single disease. Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 134.

39. Schleiner, “Infection and Cure,” 510–12.

40. Vives, *De institutione feminae christianae*, 43–47. The story circulated in Theodor Zwinger’s *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* (1604), which Schleiner describes as “the largest Renaissance compendium of received knowledge.” Schleiner, “Infection and Cure,” 506–8.

41. Allen, *Wages of Sin*, 52.

42. Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, II, 337, n. 1. Hayden, *Pox*, 45.

43. Davidson, “‘This pernicious delusion,’” 62–81. Twenty percent of Scottish females receiving treatment for venereal disease in the 1920s and 1930s were

under age fifteen; the figure for males was 3 percent. Davidson also argues that citing popular belief in a "virgin cure" allowed authorities to ignore abuse within families and project the threat out of the home to anonymous dangerous men on the streets. For similar reasons, some health officials preferred to blame transmission to children on environmental factors and on nonsexual physical contact rather than assault by family members.

44. Siena, *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor,* 193–95. Private Correspondence: 7 December 2004, 8 December 2004, 27 October 2005. See also Dunlap, "Syphilitic Children," 114–27.

Conclusion: Friction in the Archives

Epigraph 1. ASF Manoscritti 66, 30r. I am grateful to Nerida Newbigin for this reference. The diarist is identified as "Susier" by the editors of a volume of the Medici's own file of reports and correspondence on the affair (ASF Mediceo del Principato, ms. 6354) that was published in 1886 in Florence as *Il parentado fra la principessa Eleonora de'Medici e il principe Don Vincenzo Gonzaga e i Cimenti a cui fu costretto il detto Principe per attestare come egli fosse abile alla generazione.* (Firenze, 1886): 6. The documents correct some small points in Susier's gossipy account, including the date and location of the test. Some of what follows is based on Helmstutler Di Dio, "Rising to the Occasion." For an expanded account that cites more documents generated by the case, see Appendix, "Sexual Politics: Giulia and the Crown Prince Gonzaga."

Epigraph 2. BRF, Moreni, AD 93, 136v.

1. The Medici correspondence is contained in the collection *Il parentado* while the Mantuan letters were published the same year as *Altri documenti inediti sul parentado fra la principessa Eleonora de'Medici e il principe Don Vincenzo Gonzaga e i Cimenti a cui fu costretto il detto Principe per attestare la sua potenza virile.*

2. *Il parentado,* 107–8, 110–15, 128.

3. "mostrando gran risentimento di voluntà per assaltarla allhora" (March 8), and "et fece forza, ma gentilmente, di haverla" (March 10). Vinta explained his second refusal only on the grounds "because it was Friday." Catholics were to avoid sex on Wednesdays and Fridays (days of penance) and on Saturdays and during daytime hours on Sundays to avoid ritual pollution when they went to church; a day was reckoned to begin at sundown the previous evening. Vinta clearly observed this spiritual calendar when scheduling his dynastic rape. He had earlier expressed concern that the test in Venice be held quickly to be finished before Holy Week. The first scheduled test came after sundown on Sunday, 11 March (hence, already Monday in contemporary reckoning), and the next

(successful) test began after sundown on Wednesday, 14 March; Vincenzo's second *assalto* was delayed till after sundown on Sunday, 18 March, *Il parentado,* 145–68, 90–95. On the days and times for sex, see Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society,* 157–58, 162.

4. On Giulia's preparation the first night, Vinta reported that she had been "preparata, levata et ripulita in ogni parte di maniera, da farne venire voglia ad un huomo di stucco." *Il parentado,* 160–61.

5. "disse di aver rotto tre lancie et che sarebbe passato alla 4 se la giovine fosse stata salda." This comes from the report of the Mantuan agent Marcello Donati to Duke Guglielmo. *Altri documenti,* 112.

6. *Il parentado*, 192. Vinta's account is clearly aimed at picturing Giulia as complicit, although his own descriptions and the interview she gave the morning after are ambiguous (see Appendix). For other accounts of how some women responded to rape and prostitution, see D'Amico, "Shameful Mother," 109–20.

7. Mary Douglas captured this willingness of patriarchal societies to set aside taboos and conventions when dealing with girls as property: "When male dominance is accepted as a central principle of social organization and applied without inhibition and with full rights of physical coercion, beliefs in sexual pollution [e.g., incest taboos] are not likely to be highly developed." *Purity and Danger*, 143.

8. The sale was an indirect one. The Pietà sold the house to the Convent of S. Salvadore in Borgo Ognissanti in a transaction negotiated in 1564 and finalized only after the girls had finally left the house (3 December 1568). ASF 112/88, 4v. Giovanni da Sommaia then purchased it a few weeks later on 29 December 1568. ASF Decima Granducale, 3611. Unicorno, SMN, 1534, 75r.

9. Friar Romano Felice Viccioni, *Chronicles of the Sisters of the Pietà*. This is a paraphrase and slight condensing of the preface "To the Reader" that Friar Romano Felice Viccioni added when he rewrote the chronicles after becoming the Pietà's spiritual father in 1700. BRF Moreni, AD 93, 3r–v, 10r–32v.

10. BRF, Moreni, AD 93, 135r–v, 137r–44r.

11. Strocchia, "Savonarolan Witnesses," 393–418.

12. BRF, Moreni, AD 93, 194r–v. Marchi, *Vita di R.do Padre Alessandro Capocchi*, 69–73. The Pietà sheltered 340 girls from 1558 to the end of Capocchi's term in 1568. Of these, 215 died while wards of the home, and of the 133 for whom death dates remain, 114 died before Capocchi. ASF CRSGF 112/79, 1v–57r.

Appendix: Sexual Politics

1. The account here is based on contemporary letters sent between court officials and the ruling families, and collected in two volumes in the late nine-

teenth century. *Il parentado,* 6, 18, 32–43, 74–83, 104. Conti, *Altri documenti inediti*, 11. See also Helmstutler Di Dio, "Rising to the Occasion."

2. Belisario Vinta to Grand Duke Francesco I (21 February, 1584), *Il parentado,* 107–8. The home "where the nuns of the Ceppo once stayed" would have been either S. Niccolò or S. Maria Vergine, though Vinta, who was from Volterra and who had spent the day moving around the Innocenti foundling home and all three of Florence's conservatories, may have been confused about this. A contemporary Florentine chronicle confirms that the girl was from the Pietà, as does the editor of the collection of Mantuan letters. ASF Manoscritti 66, 30r. *Altri documenti inediti*, 7.

3. Belisario Vinto to Grand Duke Francesco I (21, 22, and 24 February, 1584), *Il parentado*, 110–15, 121–23. Neither S. Maria Vergine nor S. Niccolò records a "Giulia" in their ranks. The Pietà accepted a Giulia di Cesare da Fiesole in 1574 at age 8; this would have made her 18 at the time of the test, and certainly old enough to have been used and closer in age to Eleonora de Medici. ASF CRSGF Pietà 112/79, 69v, #421.

4. Belisario Vinto to Grand Duke Francesco I (22 February, 1584), *Il parentado*, 123.

5. Vincenzo Gonzaga to Marcello Donati (21 February, 1584), *Altri documenti inediti*, 89–90.

6. Belisario Vinto to Grand Duke Francesco I (23 February, 1584), *Il parentado*, 128.

7. The editors of *Il parentado*, F. Orlando and G. Baccini, identified the girl as a bastard of the Albizzi and as living in the Pietà, based on information given in published diplomatic correspondence between the Tuscan and French courts. *Il parentado,* 6; citing Abel Desjardins, *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Tosanca* (Paris: 1872): vol. IV, p. 504. As it was not uncommon to conceal the parentage of conservatory girls by giving a false or incomplete father's name, she could still have been an Albizzi; her fate and even date of departure from the Pietà are not stated in the Pietà register. ASF CRSGF Pietà 112/79, 69v, #421.

8. Belisario Vinto to Grand Duke Francesco I (11 March 1584), *Il parentado,* 161–62.

9. Piero Galletti to Grand Duke Francesco I (16 March 1584), *Il parentado,* 189.

10. Marcello Donati to Belisario Vinta (15 March 1584), *Altri documenti inediti*, 109–11.

11. Piero Galletti to Grand Duke Francesco I (16 March 1584), *Il parentado,* 190.

12. Belisario Vinto to Grand Duke Francesco I (15 March 1584), *Il parentado,* 184–88. Punctuation added.

13. Carlo Gonzaga to Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga (17 March 1584), *Altri documenti inediti,* 118.

14. Finucci, "There's the Rub," 523–26. Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga died in 1612.

15. McGee proposes that the Pietà's Giulia was actually named Lucia, but it is more likely that the woman who had been at the center of the secret test would have been given a new identity on her return to Florence. McGee, "Pompeo Caccini and *Euridice*," 81–82, 90–93, 98–99. I am grateful to John Edwards for this reference.

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